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IN THE CLAWS  
OF THE DRAGON



**BY THE SAME AUTHOR**

**STRANGE STORIES FROM THE  
LODGE OF LEISURES.** (Signed  
George Soulie.) (Constable and Co.,  
London, 1913.)

**TSEU-HSI.** (Signed Lie sou.) (Nilsson,  
Paris, 1911.)

**LA BRISE AU CLAIR DE LUNE.**  
(*La Revue*, 1915.)

**LOTUS D'OR.** (Charpentier, Paris, 1912.)

**LA MUSIQUE EN CHINE.** (Leroux,  
Paris, 1912.)

**ESSAI SUR LA LITTÉRATURE  
CHINOISE.** (*Mercure de France*, 1912.)

**LES OPÉRAS CHINOIS, etc., etc.**

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# IN THE CLAWS OF THE DRAGON

## I

"REALLY, those Westerners are not reasonable!" said the Duke of Krong, Ambassador of China in France, to the First Secretary, Ming-ni, Viscount of Lin.

The Ambassador was fat, as became a Chinese dignitary of his rank, his wealth and his age. His long eyes were always half shut as if to sharpen his look. A few stiff hairs, scattered over the lower part of his round face, did duty for a beard.

He was receiving his guests for the inauguration of his newly built Chinese palace of the Rue de Babylon, and examined them critically.

"Look at the dresses of those barbarians!" he pursued. "Is it possible to imagine something more uncomfortable, hideous and ridiculous? I must even say more shockingly immodest? The men display their shirts! Think of that! What would you say if we displayed our shirts? And that absurd black waistcoat with a tail, which they call 'evening suit'! The men look exactly like those white-breasted black fowl of the Polar Seas, the penguins."



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"It is true that it can hardly be worse," approved Ming-ni. "But their ordinary costumes are not so bad."

"Yes," sneered the Duke, "their hard collars, four or five inches high ! I tell you that a whole population which dresses like that is not led by Reason, but by the wildest and lowest impulses."

Ming-ni put on an expressionless face. He did not enjoy over much these remarks, which he had to recognize as perfectly exact and sensible, but which touched only a very small part of a civilization he had learnt to understand after ten years of studies.

The Duke, like so many European diplomats, was unable to speak or read a word in the language of the country where he had been appointed as Ambassador. That did not prevent him from being confident, like the same diplomats, that he possessed a complete and immediate knowledge of the population with which he had thus no direct, and very little indirect, contact. He relied on his First Secretary to do all the work, and disagreed politely but firmly with him on everything concerning the "men of the Ocean."

Thus Ming-ni put on the face of a statue, which he resembled already by his thin and straight nose, his firm mouth, and his even complexion, without a touch of colour.

"And the women !" continued the Duke unrelentingly. "More than half naked, showing to everybody their shoulders ! Oh ! but for very

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little they would be naked like savages ! In the heat of summer, that would be reasonable enough, though primitive, but in winter ! And I am certain that they would be frightfully shocked if the men went about half naked as they are."

Ming-ni was saved the obligation of making an answer by the arrival of a new group of guests. They held out their hands to their host. But the old man kept his fists close to each other and waved them up and down two or three times, according to the Chinese custom. The visitors, a little at a loss to know what to do, bowed awkwardly, and went away.

"They ought to know that we civilized people do not shake hands. It is a dirty and stupid custom," grumbled the Ambassador.

Just then came two ladies. The elder, evidently the mother, addressed Ming-ni in a tone which betrayed the consciousness she had of her own importance.

"Excuse me, monsieur," said she. "You speak French, don't you?"

"Yes, madam," he answered.

"My friend who was to introduce us to His Excellency is not here, and I have not had the pleasure of meeting the Duke before. It seems a little difficult for us to be under his roof in such conditions. May I ask you to introduce us? Baroness and Mademoiselle de Rosen."

"Certainly, madam," said Ming-ni, with a slight bow.



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Then, turning towards the Ambassador, he said in Chinese :

“ O Duke ! O Great Man ! Here are two women who desire to have their names mentioned to your Precious Ears.”

“ Never mind their names, O Elder Brother ! ” replied the old man. “ I can't catch these barbarous sounds.”

The eldest lady nodded her head majestically, and with a great authority proffered her hand. The Duke answered by a meaningless smile and waved his fists. But the lady was not satisfied with that, and continued to offer her hand. Overcome by such an insistence, the Ambassador gave her with diffidence his plump fingers, leaving them only for a second at her disposal. The younger lady, who had noticed his hesitation, made a curtsy.

“ Here is a sensible girl,” said the relieved old man. “ Go with her into the other room and give her some sweets or cakes. Western women are even fonder of them than our womenfolk. Do you remember our last reception? Three of these helpless creatures were taken in the rush when the door of the dining-room was opened. They were crushed, they fainted, and we had all the difficulties in the world to revive them.”

The grey-blue eyes of the young lady were turned on Ming-ni with an unmistakable look of admiration and sympathy. Her fair hair and her delicately pink and white complexion enhanced her beauty.



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But the principles of Confucius forbid men to look at women who are not their own. "What the eyes do not see the heart doth not desire." And Ming-ni, prudently avoiding to look at her, obeyed the order of his superior with the same statuelike face.

"May I introduce myself now?" said he. "I am the Viscount of Lin."

He bowed and shook hands with the two ladies.

"Since your friend is not here," added he, "will you allow me to conduct you? Would you like to join the dancers, or see the conservatories?"

He offered with indifference his arm to the mother, who was surprised not to notice in his manners the slight suspicion of sacrifice she was accustomed to from young men on such occasions. He had not even the look of regret they threw involuntarily at her daughter.

"My friend told us that you have the most beautiful and original conservatories in Paris," said Madame de Rosen.

"You will judge for yourself our humble efforts," he answered.

And they went into the crowd.

The Duke of Krong had decided that everything in the Embassy would be Chinese. In consequence, all his staff had retained the gorgeous and easy costumes of the Far East. In the palace, all the furniture was of deeply carved ebony, with incrustations of mother-of-

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pearl and variegated marble. Ancient pictures, on a silk made brown by the centuries, covered the walls. Thick carpets, with blue boughs on a golden background, coming from Yarkend or Khotan, deadened the noise of the footsteps.

The visitors behaved as they would have done in a museum, stopping in front of the various treasures, admiring and criticizing aloud. Many of them hardly restrained themselves from doing the same in front of the young secretaries in shining embroidered gowns.

Ming-ni walked on, erect, self-possessed and enigmatic. A two-eyed peacock feather inserted at the top of his hat, under the blue sapphire button mark of his rank. It trailed on his back and covered the commencement of his long, thick and intensely black plaited hair (which, by the way, was not his own, as he had cut his hair short in the Western fashion).

They crossed the crowded rooms, and, turning the corner of a passage, found themselves suddenly in the most peaceful and original scenery.

The conservatory was in reality formed with several rooms crossing one another at different angles. The Chinese gardener, instead of trying to realize a pre-conceived ideal learned at school, had given play to his fantasy and used to the utmost all the opportunities offered to him. Here, a turning glade in the bamboos. There a diminutive mountain scenery, with wild rocks ; a little valley, where a small temple and a pagoda



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were half hidden under dwarf pines which seemed to be at least a hundred years old. The hills reflected themselves in a pond where nelumbos and nymphæas spread their wide leaves and splendid flowers. Cunningly contrived openings in the leaves and shrubbery allowed one to see the people walking at the farthest end of the conservatories. The real distance changing the proportions added to the illusion. Seats were fashioned of the most extraordinary shape so as not to give any idea of their real size in comparison with the landscape.

Madame de Rosen gave utterance to the little exclamation by which well-bred people usually express their wonder.

"Look, Monique," said she to her daughter, "these magnolias and that strange red star of a flower! And that pagoda! I simply love it!"

"It is really wonderful!" said Mademoiselle de Rosen.

After they had gone to the end of the last conservatory the subject was exhausted. Monique turned to their cavalier and asked him:

"Do you dance?"

"Oh no—oh yes!" said he, remembering his duties. "May I ask you to give me your next dance?"

"Certainly, with pleasure. Perhaps mother will sit here and wait for us. Won't you, mama?"

"Yes, yes!" grumbled the other, who could

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hardly resign herself to her disinterested rôle of chaperon.

Ming-ni bowed to the old lady and offered his arm to Monique. They slowly retraced their steps towards the orchestra, the faint harmonies of which came to them with the peculiar sadness of all joyous music when heard from afar.

"Why did you say 'No' when I asked you if you danced?" said suddenly the young girl.

"Well," answered guardedly the other. "Are you sure that I said 'No'?"

"Perfectly sure," insisted the other.

"And you, do you like dancing? You must, as every young lady does," pursued the diplomat.

"No, I do not like dancing at all. Shall we sit down somewhere here?"

"With pleasure."

The seat they found was small for two. They did not notice the fact until they were seated. Then neither ventured to make a remark. So they found themselves squeezed against each other, which position is not favourable for a conversation, especially between people who are not very well acquainted. They remained silent.

The sweet and healthy perfume of Monique rose to the nostrils of Ming-ni and awoke his attention. He stole a glance for the first time at the beautiful young foreigner. Her blue-grey eyes sparkled in the semi-darkness. A sort of mysterious light came from her clear skin. He thought of the indignation of the Duke about women's low dresses, and smiled inwardly. In



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himself, he did not disapprove so much of the custom. The sight was sometimes worth the looking.

The silence lasted. They suddenly spoke at the same time.

"I would like very much to go to China," said she.

"Would you like to go to China?" asked he.

They both laughed at this coincidence of thought.

"And now," said Monique, "will you tell me why you said 'No' when I asked you if you danced? I will not accept an evasive answer," added she, smiling.)

"Really," answered he calmly, "if you want the truth, men never dance in China. We like very much to look at professional dancers, but we consider it as conducive to vanity and mis-demeanour, or even immodesty."

"It is not such an untrue aspect of the thing," mused Monique.

"Physical exertions and sports of any kind are contrary to the life of the mind, and every scholarly person must avoid them," added he. "Primitive instincts and animal impulses are strong enough; they need no training or exercising. If we want to escape from our natural condition of beasts, we must live only by the spirit."

"Is it living by the spirit which has made the Ambassador as fat as he is?" asked Monique innocently.

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He laughed and changed the conversation.

"I like very much your beautiful city," said he.

"Do you find any beauty in these dark, dirty, muddy streets, or in the row of prison-like houses with the streaks of coal-dust running on their walls?"

"Well," conceded he. "Outside they perhaps are a little deficient in form and colour, and even sad compared to our picturesque palaces and houses. But inside they are very comfortable and even beautiful. Those great halls such as they have in some hotels——"

"Oh, don't speak to me of the great hotels with their little five o'clock teas!"

"And the Parisian society is very gay and pleasant," continued he unabashed.

"The Parisian society? Which one? There is no such thing in Paris. Some people collect together a few personalities and have a 'salon,' as certain bandmasters compose a 'potpourri' for the orchestra by tying vaguely together a few known melodies. There are also a few cases of good friends. But can that be called 'society'?"

"Whatever their name is, these social meetings are not at all disagreeable," answered he with a quiet politeness.

"Do you think so?" said she disdainfully. "Conversations are reduced to a few remarks on the same subjects always. Even the pleasure of relating scandalous stories on absent people is widely compensated by the certainty to be



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libelled mercilessly as soon as the door will be closed on one's back."

"Travels are very easy. One can go anywhere and see new sights."

"Yes, but you come back. Because, to live out of Paris in such circles is called 'to bury oneself' in the country. To live out of France is called 'to exile oneself.' Both actions are dreaded as if all the life and superiority of the world were concentrated in the small group of people present."

"If they believe it, it is true for them, and that is sufficient for their happiness. But you seem, I should say, a little disillusioned. Why don't you go to China? You would see something different from Paris, I can tell you."

"If it is in any way resembling to this conservatory, I would willingly live there all my life. But it cannot be the same all over the country. China is big——"

"Only ten or twelve times as big as France," said Ming-ni simply.

"As much as that?" said the astonished young girl.

"And the population is more than thirteen times as numerous. . . . But it is very much like this conservatory on a very large scale."

And he began to talk about his country. It was a sort of revelation for Monique, for whom China had always been nothing else than a name on her atlas of geography. She vaguely connected it with the porcelain vases, the screens,



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embroideries, and other curios which she used to see on so many tables and mantelpieces.

They were interrupted by the Ambassador himself, who, deprived of his Secretary, and thus of every means of contact with his guests, had quietly gone to the conservatories to have a little rest.

"Did you give her some sweets?" asked he of Ming-ni.

"We spoke of our country instead," answered he. "I wish the Great Man could have heard what she said about the people here in the West."

"Very sensible girl. I told you, O Elder Brother! And she is beautiful in her way."

The young girl blushed under the calm and coldly appreciative glance of the old man. She felt what a poultry in the market could feel under the scrutiny of a cook.

Ming-ni saved the situation.

"His Excellency said that I ought to conduct you to the dining-room."

"Oh, did he?" said she, relieved. "How thoughtful!"

But at the moment appeared Madame de Rosen, accompanied by a gentleman who bowed to Monique and claimed the dance just beginning.

She shook hands with Ming-ni and went away regretfully.

## II

"WE might really have come back earlier," said Madame de Rosen to her daughter while they returned home in the motor-car. "I met only two people we knew."

"I met them also, and I am sorry of it," answered the girl calmly.

"It is all very well for you," said the old lady angrily. "You go about, you dance with people you don't even know. But I assure you that it is no fun sitting gloomily in a corner and watching people who enjoy themselves."

"Poor mother! Your lot is too bad," answered affectionately the young girl.

"Though this garden is really unique," pursued the mother, satisfied with this tribute to her pains. "It is a pity that nobody will believe our descriptions."

"Is it not wonderful?" said Monique eagerly. "And all these Chinese with their beautiful dresses. And their hats! They are really nicer than top-hats."

"It reminded me somehow of that reception at St. Cloud in the Second Empire, where I met your father for the first time."

"And you know, mother, that China is a very



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big country. I mean that it is much more important than we think."

"Perhaps," answered the old lady evasively. "It is so far, one never knows the truth about such distant countries."

The car stopped at their door. They went quickly up to their flat, and after a hasty kiss, retired each into her own room.

Monique was long before going to sleep. She shut her eyes at last, and dreamt of wonderful landscapes.

On the morrow, as soon as she was up, she looked into the bookcase for works about the Far East. She found a few which she began to read.

The first time she went to a dinner-party she spoke of China to a young man who sat beside her, and was disappointed to perceive his absolute lack of sympathy. He tried some scandalous story, and was surprised in his turn to see that she did not laugh. She went home very early that evening, and refused the next invitation. Her mother was incensed.

"What is this new nonsense?" asked she disdainfully. "Are you going to stay at home all your life and read books of travel like a child?"

"Better read books of travels than listen to the conversation of silly young men," answered Monique.

"Men are stupid, we know that," conceded the mother; "but we have got to marry them and live with them, so what is the use of stating

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what they are? If you don't go out, you will never marry."

"It does not appear to me that it would be such a great loss," answered Monique, "especially for the other party," added she, with a false modesty.

"You don't want to marry now? You are absolutely mad! I would rather give you away to anybody than keep you unmarried. . . . My daughter unmarried!"

Monique could not refuse all invitations. She could not restrain either from speaking about the subject which filled her mind.

In a very short time everybody among her friends knew her whim, and, some kindly, some treacherously, tried to favour it. The lady who had asked for her an invitation to the Chinese Embassy was highly pleased to see her enthusiasm and to have something to do with it. She accompanied Monique on a visit to the daughters of the Duke of Krong. Conversation was somewhat difficult, the young ladies beginning only to study French. They were, however, very pleased with one another. A few days afterwards, the worthy lady arranged a dinner-party, at which Monique found herself sitting by Ming-ni. This time he was dressed in the simple uniform of an officer of the Guard. A turban of blue silk with a few golden embroideries encircled his long and refined face. A short coat of dark blue silk with a dragon embroidered on the breast, a belt

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with jade ornaments, high boots of black silk with thick white felt soles, gave him an original and very distinguished appearance.

Madame de Rosen was not very pleased to see the delight of her daughter. She saw Monique looking at the thin, long and supple pale hands of Ming-ni, and after that at the short, thick, red and hairy hands of her other neighbour.

She was obliged to recognize that the young diplomat had a perfect attitude. Under his admirably polite reserve appeared certainly an interest for the beautiful girl who spoke to him with such simple friendliness. But he was so self-possessed and reserved that Madame de Rosen was equally furious that he should not be more gratified with her daughter's attentions, and that he should be really so worthy of such attentions.

During the greater part of the evening they remained together. After several unsuccessful attempts of the old lady to induce her daughter to leave, she at last succeeded.

The door was hardly shut when she began :  
" You are absolutely mad to compromise yourself with a Chinese, and in such a frightful manner. With a Frenchman it does not matter. It is the custom. But with a Chinese ! Everybody noticed it."

" Maybe, mama," answered Monique. " But it is the first time that I really enjoyed myself at a dinner-party."

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"Bah!" said the old lady, shrugging her shoulders. "One would think that you have always sacrificed yourself."

"I did not enjoy myself very often, anyhow."

"And I assure you that the persons who sit beside you enjoy themselves still less when you speak to them of your China."

"They are so silly!"

"They are not silly at all. They live in their country and in their time."

"Jolly country and jolly time! I tell you, mother, that really I cannot speak any more of the dresses of Mrs. So-and-so, of her last divorce . . . or of her next one. Our contemporaries have destroyed everything from the past. Their new order of things is such a failure that our civilization will probably disappear."

"Let it disappear, my dear girl. We will disappear before that. And in the meanwhile we must live and marry. As for you, our family and fortune are such as you may pretend to any one. Don't play with your reputation for a passing fancy."

There was a silence. No answer forthcoming, she continued:

"And you will see when the years pass and you find yourself alone. You will be ready to marry anybody then."

"No. Not an ordinary man like those we meet too often."

"You will perhaps marry your Chinese?" sneered the old lady.



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"Why not?" answered the other simply.

"Oh! Do you mean it?"

"Why not?" repeated Monique. "He is a hundred times superior to the whole lot of the others."

"No? You think it really possible to marry a Chinese?"

"Of course I do. As well as any other foreigner."

"You would have me going about with a Chinese for a son-in-law? I, for one, will never accept it."

And the worthy lady, quite roused, stalked majestically out of the room. She nearly slammed the door.

### III

"I ADMIRE you, O Elder Brother!" said the Duke, who was reclining rather than sitting in an armchair. "At your age, and in spite of my work, I had three second wives. I wonder how you can live without even one."

"The pleasures of love are a waste of time, O Great Man," answered Ming-ni, detaching the ashes of his cigarette.

"I know! I know! They are no less a pleasant necessity of Nature."

"Besides, I must confess that here, in the West, they are not conveniently provided for. With married women, they are very dangerous, complicated, and consequently absurd. With unmarried girls, they present all sorts of difficulties, socially as well as in other ways, and might be in the way of my work. I hate scandal."

"Perfectly right," nodded the Ambassador. "All the fault is in the scandal. What nobody knows does not exist."

"Then as I would not stoop to the lower and very dirty sort of what they call 'love' here, I have to go without wives."

"But why don't you marry one of those foreigners? She might help you in your work



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if you chose her from a good family. You are nearly no more a foreigner for them, having lived ten years in their country. And as you intend to follow up your career and stay out of our 'Eighteen Provinces' all your life, it would be just the thing for you to do."

"They hold too great a place in the house, those foreign women," said Ming-ni.

"Ah! Ah!" laughed the old man. "And in China? You don't remind the true state of affairs. Women are mistresses in the house always and everywhere."

"Then why should we forsake our liberty?"

"Because," said the Ambassador gravely, "you must have children. The pleasures of love are given to us as an inducement to have a family. They are natural, and in consequence cannot be disregarded. It is high time that you should have a son to continue your lineage and accomplish the sacrifices in the Temple of the Ancestors. In order to have a son, you must have a wife. Why don't you marry that sweet girl . . . what is her name . . . Monique? My daughters have the best opinion of her."

"Well," said Ming-ni hesitatingly, "I never thought about the question. She is certainly charming, and she holds very sane views about our country. But I never considered the question. And my family would have perhaps different ideas."

"Leave it to me. I am your father and mother here. I shall write to your family."

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This conversation took place some time after the reception at the Embassy. In the interval Ming-ni and Monique had met several times. The Ambassador, who wished Ming-ni to stay with him in Paris, thought that the best plan was to have him married there. When his daughters, who had the occasion to see the evident admiration of Monique for the young diplomat, related the fact to him, he saw at once a possibility for his plans, and made private inquiries on the family de Rosen. The result was highly satisfactory. He told his daughters to invite the ladies and be very friendly with them.

Madame de Rosen was flattered by the delicate and constant attentions of the Ambassador's daughters. She was also flattered to meet, in the splendid drawing-room of the Rue de Babylon, the wives and daughters of the representatives of all the nations. She could not resist, being at dinner-parties, the pleasure of saying negligently : "Madame X, the Italian Ambassador's wife, whom I met the other day. . . . The young Duchess of Krong, who is a great friend of my daughter. . . ." Such references were received with the respect and awe which are usually given to the utterances of those who frequent the highest society. But she was considered as much less pleasant than before, and was sometimes left to herself. In consequence, she found her friends less entertaining, and came to think that Monique was not



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altogether wrong in her judgment on the world. She began to read also some books on China, and she spoke even of Confucius, whom she confounded nevertheless with the Emperor of Japan or with a celebrated Jesuit missionary. She invited Ming-ni several times with the daughters of the Ambassador.

Nothing would perhaps have come out of all that. Ming-ni was not at all decided to such a marriage, and Monique considered him as so distant that she did not perceive the man in him.

However, the Ambassador went with his family for the summer to Etretat, where Madame de Rosen had a little villa.

Ming-ni was, of course, invited by his chief, and had thus the opportunity of meeting frequently the young girl. They went about freely, as is the custom at every summer resort.

One day they found themselves alone, climbing down one of those precipitous descents to the sea, among the cliffs, which are called "valleuses" in the locality. The expansive blue sea sparkled in the sunshine, and between the blue of the sea and the deep green of the country, the long line of white and coloured cliffs wound and disappeared in the mauve horizon. An abrupt valley hid the view and sheltered an old ramshackle thatched little farm dating probably from William the Conqueror. Nobody was in sight. The only noise to be heard was the low hush of the gentle surf on the shingle below.

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The valley ended by a circular staircase hollowed out of the chalk, and descending to the beach. Loopholes, here and there, gave a sufficient light to see the uneven steps.

Ming-ni and Monique went into the staircase and began the difficult descent. The girl wore those high-heeled shoes that fashion has decreed necessary against every idea of comfort, beauty, and health. She paid the penalty, and soon slipped on the wet chalk, nearly spraining her ankle. Ming-ni, who was beside her, grasped her quickly, and just in time to prevent her from falling. He had had no time to consider proprieties and prudence ; his arm was now round her waist. Her warm and supple body was burning him. She was no more a foreigner. For her, either, he was no more a Chinese, but a man, very gentle and strong, who held her, and whom she loved.

He asked her in a troubled voice if her foot was very painful. She answered, "A little," also in a changed voice, and asked if she was not too heavy, which he denied vigorously, saying that it was wiser that he should not leave her before they were at the bottom.

They went down very slowly and carefully, neither of them being in a hurry to see the end of the staircase. Fashion and high-heeled shoes again achieved the thing. A few steps further Monique slipped a second time, and so badly that she threw her free arm round the neck



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of the young man. They reeled and nearly fell, clinging desperately to each other. Then they stopped.

They were just at the opening of the stairs. Before them, the sea was breaking in small wavelets on the grey pebbles. The silent beach was empty. The cliffs towered more than two hundred feet over them. Nothing had been disturbed and spoiled by men in this landscape since the beginning of the world. The young couple were again Adam and Eve.

The bright sun lighted wonderful colours in the eyes of Monique, thought Ming-ni. And the girl judged that she had never seen such lustrous, brilliant, sweet, dark eyes, similar to a liquid fire. Both of them were loth to unloose their hands. Their breathing quickened. A wave of colour went up to their cheeks. She lifted her face to his, and he slowly put a passionate and long kiss on her lips.

They disengaged themselves suddenly as if somebody had called them. The girl still holding his hand, said :

“ You must speak to my mother.”

“ The Ambassador will,” answered Ming-ni.

They sat down on the shingle, with the burning desire to kiss again. They thought of the staircase, and said, both at the same time :

“ It is time to go back, is it not? ”

They laughed a little embarrassedly and started the climb. He offered his help. She accepted. At the first turning they stopped and

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kissed again. There were only three turnings, alas !

They found themselves at length out in the valley, a little flushed, but very happy, and perceiving innumerable new beauties in the old, half-ruined buildings, in the fresh colour of the rich grass, in the light clear sky overhead, and in the unlimited expanse of the sea.



## IV

THE Ambassador was delighted when Ming-ni asked him to act as "honorable intermediary" and to make the formal demand of marriage to Madame de Rosen. As the young man spoke of his own family's consent for the ceremony, the Duke interrupted him.

"We are not in China, O Elder Brother! And the customs of our country cannot be followed here. If we had to wait for the sanction of your father, your marriage could not take place before a year. I will telegraph to your Respectable Lord and settle the question. Just write a letter to him, I will do the rest."

Ming-ni could not but comply with these orders. He went to his room and sat at his table. There, rolling meditatively his writing-brush on the ink-stone, he searched in his mind for the most literary formulæ. Then he began to write, covering the paper with elegantly traced ideograms.

To the Venerable Chen, Count of Lin, his son, the Little Dog of the Household.

Since the day when the Small One has left the respectable roof which shelters the Car of Light, the time has passed as an arrow. Light and shade have come and gone, as does

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the weaver's shuttle. My constant desire has been to know that the Car of light and the Precious Jewels have enjoyed a robust health and an unmixed happiness.

The Imperial Envoy, the Grand Man, has deigned to bestow on the Little Dog of the Household his kindest favours. He has been my father and mother. Always attentive to his orders, I have always obeyed. I hope you will be satisfied.

The Grand Man has recently given me the order to take a wife after the fashion of the West, in order that my services should be more useful to my country. I obeyed. She is a Frenchwoman, of an honourable family. Her father has a title of nobility of the fifth rank.

The custom of the Western natives is not that our family should supply the gowns and ornaments. It is the family of the bride who gives her a trousseau and a certain sum of money as a dowry.

In the hope that you will approve of my decision, I kneel down and I knock the ground with my forehead again and again.

He read his own prose with a certain pride, meditating that it would certainly strike his father as remarkable, and be shown to the different authorities and notables of the city. He imagined the compliments which would be made, and enjoyed them in advance. Such are the most delicate and perhaps the greatest pleasures of literary works.

He folded carefully the letter and inserted it in a long envelope, tracing on the red band which sealed it the names, titles, and addresses of his father. Then he put the whole thing in a foreign envelope, so that it should not be spoilt by the post office.



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In the meantime the Ambassador, without waiting for an answer to his telegram, put on at once his robes and hat of semi-state, ordered his carriage, and told his daughter to accompany him in order to act as interpreter.

Madame de Rosen saw them coming and was overwhelmed. She ran to her room and, calling hastily her maid, she told her to introduce the visitors in the drawing-room, and to come up at once to help her into a new gown.

While she dressed more quickly than she had ever done, she grieved inwardly to be thus obliged to make the Ambassador wait for her. She little knew that it was the greatest mark of respect she could show to a Chinese visitor. To make them wait is as much as to tell them that the preparations made for their reception are never considered as sufficient.

She entered at last in her drawing-room, half bursting in a grey silk dress. The Ambassador rose heavily from the sofa on which he had stretched his weighty person.

For a moment they exchanged the most amiable and confused greetings, which the young Duchess translated haphazard.

When the first excitement was over, the visit took a more ceremonious turn. The Duke took the lead, and his daughter translated word by word his sentences, most of which plunged the old lady in the deepest confusion, while the others always remained a mystery to her.

“O noble nurse of a beautiful child!” he

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began ; " O sorrowful widow of a most distinguished scholar ! " (In fact her husband had been a soldier and hated literature.)

" Excellency ! I am much confused. . . . I do not know what to say ! "

" Since the Powerful Master of the Palace has departed for the lower regions——"

" What," thought Madame de Rosen with astonishment, " does he mean ? "

" He has left a tender rose in the garden of your virtue, and the heat of your maternal love has made it bloom. From the distant regions of the ancient province of Se-chrwa has come another rose, grown also in the shelter of parental love. Shall we graft those two roses on the same trunk and help them to give forth many new buds ? "

Happily for the old lady, Monique had told her that the Ambassador would come and ask her hand for Ming-ni. Otherwise, she would never have guessed the meaning of such flowery language, and the scene would have been painful. In the circumstances she was ashamed of the platitude of the Western conversational images, and answered :

" My little rose and your dahlia will make a delicious bunch, and I am very pleased to give my consent to their union. "

To which the Ambassador answered by a bow, and tried to kneel down in order to make another deeper bow.

The lady, filled with consternation, felt sure



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that he would never be able to rise again if he did it. A gentle struggle ensued, such as is foreseen and provided for by the rites in similar cases.

At last, amidst many protestations and greetings, the old man departed, accompanied to his carriage by Madame de Rosen. She asked herself afterwards if she should not have helped him into his seat.

She came back quite startled by the unexpectedness and the ceremony of this visit. Monique was waiting for her.

"What did he say?" asked she.

"He spoke of flowers and roses and gardens. I hope I really understand. Maybe he came only to ask for a graft out of our rose-tree."

Monique laughed at the idea, and kissed her mother affectionately.

"You know very well, mother," said she, "that the Chinese always speak in wonderful images."

"And their language! A-choo-chi-to-rao—my poor girl! I would die a thousand times before being able to understand a word of it."

"Oh! I will learn it quickly enough when I am married. And, moreover, Ming-ni speaks French so well. I need not be in such a hurry to study his language."

"Especially if you stay here all your life. But what are we going to do now? Have they any special ceremony to perform?"

"Dear mama!" laughed the girl, "we are going to marry like everybody, so don't you

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worry about it. The Ambassador had to come, since your future son-in-law's parents are ten thousand miles from here."

"Ten thousand miles! Good gracious! What a distance! Anyhow, they will not be able to come every day to see you. But now let us be serious and speak of important questions. What sort of gown are you going to wear for your marriage, and where shall we go for it?"

The discussion thus commenced lasted a long time. Nothing as yet was settled when Ming-ni appeared on the scene, faultlessly clad in a frock-coat and top-hat. The bewilderment of a young fisherman who came from the beach with a basketful of seaweed on his back was so overwhelming that he remained standing with his little eyes wide open long after the door had closed on the visitor.

Ming-ni kissed ceremoniously the hands of the ladies. He was going to sit down and have a grave and affectionate conversation with his future mother-in-law, but Monique stopped his generous and polite intentions and led him away to her own room. He found the means, anyhow, before leaving, to thank very correctly the old lady for her consent, and to tell her that he hoped to make the happiness of her daughter.

From that day began for Monique that always too short a period of enchantment, more and more interspersed with long visits to the dressmaker, which precede the marriages in Europe.



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The knights of old, before taking the great oath required by the Order of Chivalry, used to pass the night in a church to ponder deeply on the importance of the vows they were going to take and which they could not break henceforth without being considered as felons.

The marriage vows are still more important for a woman, and perhaps harder to keep. Instead of passing her last days before the event in a calm retreat, where she could still reflect and think, calculate and observe, she is rushed about in a whirlwind to dressmakers, milliners, jewellers, etc., coupled with a complete set of visits to all their family and relations.

When the day of the marriage comes, they are utterly tired and worn out, physically and mentally. Most of them are so broken by the proceedings that they never recover from it.

Monique went through this ordeal without much difficulty. It was happily in summer, and many people were away. They remained as long as possible at the seaside. Nevertheless, everything and everybody seemed changed to her. The voices of the visitors reached her as from afar, and their persons appeared to her as enveloped in a sort of haze. The fact was that she never listened to them, not looked really at them, her mind being entirely taken by her present and future.

Madame de Rosen was perfect during the whole period. Her daughter was going to be a Viscountess, and though a foreign title is never

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worth a good old national one, it was something gratifying for her pride. She even developed a liking for Ming-ni. His constant and ready politeness rendered very pleasant all the social relations with him. His cold reserve, besides, inspired her with a sort of respect. She dared not speak to him as she would have done to any European.

As to Ming-ni, he carried out his duties with conscientiousness and thoroughness. His education had impressed him deeply with the great importance of the slightest details in social intercourse. But he could not help thinking how complicated and absurd the whole thing was.

It was all very well to have the greatest possible number of people present at the marriage, since their testimony might be used later on for the validity of the union, said he to himself, but it is dangerous and perfectly distasteful to go about and show your future wife to every man in town, as much as to be yourself shown to every woman one may happen to know. Just suppose that you should thus meet another girl for whom you would take a violent fancy? Or that a man would fall in love with your wife and carry her away?

The sun rose at last on the great day. Madame de Rosen had arranged that the ceremony should take place at the Madeleine, since that church was considered the most fashionable in Paris. To her intense delight, a missionary-bishop, who had known Ming-ni in



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China, offered to give the nuptial benediction to the young couple. The long white beard of the priest and the splendour of his pontifical ornaments contributed to give to the ceremony the character of a real Parisian event. Numerous photographers were sent by illustrated papers in order to take snapshots. The crowd on the Boulevards noticed their presence on the steps of the church and gathered to see what was going to happen. The policemen were obliged to telephone for reinforcements.

A bright autumnal sun shone on the gold and purple of the dais set up from the door down to the kerb. The guests invited to the church, and many who had not been invited, came in, filling up the great aisles.

The young couple appeared at last. Ming-ni wore his full dress : a high bonnet of sables, with peacocks' feathers and fox-tails hanging on his shoulders ; a heavy robe sparkling with embroideries. Monique, covered with her long veil of white lace, seemed to be simply dressed beside him.

The whole staff of the Embassy was there, also in their richest costumes. The effect was so splendid that the crowd applauded. From behind, those who could not see, pressed themselves against the first ranks of the spectators. A woman fainted. A child was trampled. There were screams and remonstrances. Never before had a marriage caused such an agitation.

During a week all the illustrated papers were

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full of photographs, while the society papers gave a long and more or less exaggerated account of the ceremony.

When the bridal procession went out, after the benediction, there were real shouts of admiration.

The reception was given at the Embassy. The crowd was perhaps greater there, and some people had to wait in their carriages for more than two hours before being able to step out under the yellow tiles of the verandah at the entrance to the hotel.

Utterly worn out, and feeling as if they were going to die any moment, the young couple remained to the last. They seemed to be so tired, however, that the Ambassador kindly told Ming-ni to take his wife away.

Monique could hardly stand while her maid helped her to change her dress. She was ready at length, and they started. When she found herself in the carriage alone with her husband, she could just grasp his hand, and went immediately to sleep.



## V

ON the day following the marriage of her daughter, Madame de Rosen was also exhausted, and she decided to stay in bed. She had ordered her maid to buy all the newspapers. Then, comfortably installed, she began to read carefully, and with a growing sense of importance, all the reports published on the wedding. After which she made a selection, choosing the most complimentary, with the intention of leaving them, as if heedlessly, on a table in her drawing-room.

In the afternoon her most intimate friends came to see her. She read them some extracts which she soon knew by heart.

The day after she had the brilliant thought of buying an album in which to keep such remembrances of a glorious day. Then the weekly illustrated papers renewed her pleasure. She had really a very pretty collection, and many of her visitors could hardly hide their bitter jealousy. Some of them went even as far as to say :

“How changed is everything ! In the old days it would have been considered as quite ordinary to have such a publicity given to one's name, while now honest women have the same love of notoriety or publicity as actresses.”

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"Oh yes," answered the old lady. "But you know Emperors, Kings and high personages have always attracted the public notice. Whatever our feelings may be, we cannot do anything without having a crowd watching us, and reporters taking notes, and photographers waiting at every corner."

Which remark aroused still bitterer pangs in the souls of her friends.

The news received from her daughter served to keep up the conversation and changed happily the current of thoughts. Monique was in Italy, of course.

The truth was that Madame de Rosen began to be most anxious about her daughter. The letters she received were short. On the first days, she ascribed it to the emotions of her new condition, and she remembered her own honeymoon trip, also in Italy, with the soft pleasure that such images usually evoke in the memory of aged people.

Then the idea suddenly occurred to her that it was not at all the same. Monique had married a Chinese. A Chinese! Just think! All her ancient, narrow and silly prejudices came back to her.

"Those Easterners have frightful habits," thought she. "He certainly smokes opium. Who knows if he has not already a harem, and if Monique will not find herself in company with a negress, a Hottentot, and a Red Indian? And I expect he gambles. It is very well known



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that Chinese are confirmed gamblers. All the books written on China record extraordinary stories about it. And it appears also that they are terrible when they are offended. They wait for years, but never forget or forgive. I ought never to have allowed this marriage—— And certainly something is wrong, otherwise Monique would have written long letters. Poor little girl ! So affectionate ! So sweet ! What must I do ? ”

After two or three days of such thoughts, she did not say any more “ What must I do ? ” She acted. Her first action was to send a telegram :

Most anxious about you. Answer at once.

She received the same evening the answer :

Coming back to-morrow. Everything all right.

She triumphed.

“ I knew that I had to do something. Action gives always the best results. Who knows ? I may have saved my daughter's life.”

She could not sleep that night, nor on the night after. The travellers had come by a train arriving in Paris fairly late. In spite of her impatience the old lady could not go to the station at two o'clock in the morning.

She was up, however, with the dawn, and waited impatiently till the hour had come when she decently could present herself at the Embassy.

She started at last, and arrived at the Rue de

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Babylon. While she was waiting in the quaintly-furnished drawing-room she fully expected to see her daughter appear thin, pale, perhaps with the visible marks of blows.

She was surprised to see her sauntering gaily through the large room, and she felt a great relief. But suddenly the thought went through her mind that her daughter was no more her own daughter; she was now the wife of a stranger, a foreigner, a Chinese! She had lost every claim on her. Up to the present day she had lived entirely for this child, and in a minute all the world of remembrances and feelings they had in common were forgotten, or, worse still, had become the property of a stranger.

"He has been nice with you at least, I hope?" asked she.

"Oh yes," said Monique, laughing. "He is adorable, so good and sweet. I am very happy, mother."

That was too much. Her daughter, the child she had brought up, was happy, while she, her poor abandoned mother, was tortured about her. She thought of telling her what she had imagined, and of adding a little hint on the ungratefulness of children, but she restrained herself, and suffered in silence. The generous wine of her maternal love had begun to turn into the strong vinegar of jealousy. She had an equal desire to say and not to say disagreeable things.

Ming-ni was deeply shocked by this early visit. He had understood the real meaning of the



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telegram. Moreover, it was absolutely contrary to the customs and rites of both Eastern and Western civilizations that his mother-in-law should have come to them. He was fully prepared to accompany his wife in the afternoon on her first visit to her mother. To show that he disapproved of such breaches of etiquette he did not go down to see his mother-in-law, affecting to consider such an early interview as a private business one with his wife.

Madame de Rosen did not understand his intention, and saw in his non-appearance a mark of disdain, by which she was mortally wounded. Monique perceived it, and later on spoke of it to her husband. It was their first little discussion. /

To say the whole truth, Madame de Rosen had not a very well defined and marked character. The atmosphere of Parisian society is deadly for those morals, those inflexible rules separating good from evil, which, according to the countries or periods, are known as Honour, Moral, or the Japanese Bushido, and have formed the knights of old and the highest form of the modern gentleman.

While she had her daughter with her, maternal love had wrought in her that element of disinterestedness, of constant attention and sympathy for other people's feelings which keeps one from finding pleasure in other people's sufferings. Moreover, her life had been very easy. She had had constant successes for herself and her

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daughter. Thus she had never had cause for envy, while her vanity had always been agreeably tickled.

Now, on the contrary, she had not the same motives or interest in giving or accepting invitations, and was accordingly much left to herself. Her daughter, instead of bringing her an even flow of love and satisfaction, was the subject of her deepest bitterness and jealousy. When Monique was affectionate, she thought it was out of pity, and her pride was wounded. When Monique, preoccupied by her new duties, had not come often enough, or had not paid sufficient attention to her conversation, the old lady ascribed it to indifference, and saw there the beginnings of a total future neglect.

In her solitude she forged and sharpened little pointed remarks which she placed at the first opportunity.

Such remarks did not seem to pierce the armour of perfect correctness which never left her son-in-law, but they penetrated deeply into Monique's heart, the more deeply that the constant and absolute politeness of Ming-ni rendered it impossible to ascribe to him any responsibility in the conflict. He contented himself every time by showing on his face that look of pained astonishment which we might have if we saw one of our guests taking with his hand a piece of meat off his plate and eating it greedily and noisily.

In order to put an end to such distressing



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situations Monique tried to prevent as much as possible any meetings between her husband and her mother.

It made matters worse. Madame de Rosen, no more restrained by the presence of her son-in-law, could speak about him to her daughter. Her own remarks convinced her more and more of her injury, and gave food to her irritation.

Monique was very disagreeably impressed by what her mother said, and tried to explain to her the mistake she made. As if it was possible to reason feelings.

Some of the remarks of her mother were not absolutely devoid of truth, and Monique had the weakness to speak of them to her husband, in the hope that he would furnish her with an argument striking enough to change the ideas of the old lady.

Ming-ni was happily possessed of the marvellous faculty of self-control, the fruit of the strong moral education of the East. He had been taught that language is to be the servant of politeness, and is useful only in order to maintain easy social relations. It must never be a traitor which gives away one's most intimate thoughts to other people, whoever these may be. To use language in order to expose one's feelings is called in China "not to speak Reason"—"poo shwo li." Children and people without education may do such a thing, but a real scholar would never do it. Thus Ming-ni did not explain to her his full

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impression of the situation. He contented himself by saying he was very sorry that any word or action on his part should have given offence or sorrow to his mother-in-law. He added that he would be still more careful in future.

Inwardly, however, considering the situation, he found it difficult, and such as might render his wife very unhappy, while his own work might be made more difficult by these family quarrels.

Several thousand years of a civilization based on reason and common sense were behind him. The innumerable generations of his ancestors had been taught, as he had been, to discern in everything the truth which one keeps for one's own profit, from the lies that one gives to others instead of truth if they are silly enough to accept them. He knew also that real feelings, such as sympathy and antipathy, cannot be commanded.

Such feelings never change, unless all the conditions should happen to change. On the other hand, his mother-in-law being of a robust health, he could not reasonably expect an early end, which, moreover, the filial love of Monique rendered most undesirable. Their speedy departure was the sole means of solving the difficulty.

On the next day, in consequence, he entered the Ambassador's room with a very grave face, and told him that he had received the news of the death of an uncle who did not leave any male descendant.

"The sacrifices to the ancestors must be, of course, accomplished as soon as possible. As



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I am the nearest descendant of the deceased, I must go at once to our native place and perform such duties. I shall come back without any delay, and shall not be away more than a few months."

As it happened, the Duke knew fairly well the family of Ming-ni, and remembered that the young man had no uncle.

The pretext was visibly false. The Ambassador knew also Ming-ni as being of a steady and serious character. He inferred that the real motive of his step was at once urgent and secret. There was no possibility of refusing him a favour to which he was entitled. Accordingly he told him very gravely the part that he personally took in his sorrow, and authorized him to start by the first steamer.

Ming-ni told the same story to his wife and to his mother-in-law, knowing very well that his wife would refuse to go if she knew his real motive.

The suddenness of the news and the necessity of hurrying the preparations for departure prevented the two ladies from realizing the cruelty of their future separation. Even the old lady, being told that her daughter would soon come back, could not say anything. She tried to offer to accompany the young couple, but Monique did not show any enthusiasm, and Ming-ni answered by speaking of the weather.

The day of the departure shone at last. Many friends came to the station to wish them a safe

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and pleasant journey. The old lady was flattered and her real sorrow was softened. When she saw the train starting she began to feel her loss. She waved her handkerchief and wiped her eyes alternately.

Monique, having kept her head out of the window as long as her mother was in view, dropped on her seat with a sigh of satisfaction in the middle of her tears. Ming-ni was intensely pleased with his success, knowing very well that the present sorrow of his wife would soon be alleviated by the attractions of the journey.



## VI

IT rained heavily when they arrived at Marseilles. The streets and houses appeared to them as dirty and as sad as those of any other Western city. The old port, however, seemed fairly picturesque with its sailing boats and small steam-launches balancing on the swell among cabbage leaves and other refuse.

They went straight to the steamer, without making the classical excursion to Notre Dame-de-la-Garde, whose golden statue on the hill could be seen in spite of the rain. They arranged their luggage in their berths. Then, from the upper deck, they watched the incoming passengers striving in the middle of innumerable boxes and trunks, and embracing again and again the relations and friends who had come to see them off. The hour of the departure struck at last. The last hawser was cast off, the mooring was left and the big liner got under way, amidst the shouts and good-byes of the passengers and of those whom they left behind.

To Ming-ni and Monique, who knew nobody on the quay, the agitation of the passengers and the tears running on many faces appeared exaggerated and even ridiculous.

They had hardly left the shelter of the

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harbour when both of them began to feel that general weariness, mingled with an increasing anxiety, which too often kills the first pleasures of a voyage on sea. The Mediterranean was still disturbed by a recent gale. They preferred to stay in their berths the greater part of the day, going on deck only to breathe the fresh and bracing air, pure and free from all defilement by men and civilization.

At Port Said the enchantment began. Monique had never been to the East. She knew nothing of the indescribable light, of this eternally warm and sweet atmosphere which clears away the worries and sorrows, unbends the nerves and gives a purely animal delight to live, to breathe and to see.

The ship glided slowly through the Suez Canal. Evening set on. A heavenly glow of blue, gold and mauve light filled the sky over the unbounded horizon. A line of pink flamingoes flew heavily over them. On the pale sand, along the water, camels laden with bright-coloured packets followed one another, led peacefully by biblical-looking drivers majestically clad in their wide "burnoos."

Monique recalled suddenly to her mind the image of the black crowd in a street of the Metropolis : the top-hats, the umbrellas, the dirty papers on the muddy pavement. It seemed to her that she had left a prison behind and was returning to a normal life.

Ming-ni, on his side, had that passionate love



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of Nature and that poetical comprehension of its beauties which are a characteristic of the Chinese mind. Both of them forgot completely for the first time those differences of race and education which, in spite of their love, were always between them. Their intellectual delights added a powerful charm to their physical and moral happiness.

They were in March. It is the season when the monsoon changes from the north-east to the south-west, and when it happens often that for a whole month not a breath of wind comes to disturb the calm surface of the water. They were lucky enough to cross the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean during one of these periods. For twenty days the sea remained a limitless sheet of deep blue colour. In the shade of the awning covering the deck, some darts of burning sun sparkled on copper hooks. A sweet breeze caressed the brow like an amorous breath. Flying-fishes passed swiftly, some even falling on the liner. The world and its cares were inexistent.

Each of the calling places brought its new wonder. Monique developed a poetical sensibility which gave her joys and delights of an order hitherto unknown to her.

They stayed a few days in Ceylon. The sweetness of the atmosphere, the smell of the flowers and perfumes, together with the strange odour which dominates the island, troubled her deeply. The moon rose while they were still at the hotel

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of Mount Lavinia, a few miles from Colombo. The white and mysterious light was so strong that they distinctly perceived all the line of the coast. The surf broke in long, regular waves on the sand beach. Behind, a forest of high cocoanut-trees bent towards the sea, their graceful heads slowly waving in the wind. Under the trees, round a fire which over and over again burst into great flames, natives were grouped, some lying down, some standing and singing one of those uncertain and hallucinating melodies which set the travellers to dream, but which lose all their magical power when they are performed before the audience of an opera house.

A boatman proposed to bring them back to Colombo. They accepted and went down in the strange craft. The sail hoisted, they started, rocking softly on the gentle waves. The silence of the night and of the sea was over everything. In the sky a light, alternately white and red, came from the great lighthouse.

Monique nestled in the arms of her husband, and with an uneven voice, said softly :

“ We will never go back to Europe. Never ! Never ! ”

Ming-ni, tactful and delicate, would not dissipate her emotion, and against his better knowledge, answered :

“ Never ! We have finished with the lies and conventions of Western civilization.”

The thousand lights of the city appeared. They climbed up the gangway of the liner.



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Monique grew more and more enchanted. They followed the coast of the Sund Islands, from which a smell of greenhouse and humus came and filled the boat. Singapore, with its broad avenues, and its heavy and moist vegetation. Saigon, the city of gardens, with its river bordered with mangroves. Hong-kong at last, the Gate of China, the opening arch of this new world, with its harbour unique in the world, shut on one side by the curve of the high island on which the houses seem to be suspended amidst the trees, and on the other side by the low factories of Kowloon and the mainland.

Walking through the city, they arrived at the flower-market. Hundreds of Cantonese women were there, violently painted, dressed in lively colours, pink, blue, red or green, behind their stalls covered with the most splendid flowers. Intoxicating perfumes filled the air. Buyers and sellers chattered gaily with that peculiar accent of the Cantonese, who seem always to have in the mouth a whole swarm of crickets.

On the following day the steamer stopped at Amoy, with its deep blue bay dotted with green islands. They arrived there when the sun was setting. All the junks of the fishermen were returning to the port. The wind filled their curious sails, which were made with straw mats, in the form of bats' wings. Their prows and poops, very high, were sculptured and painted. Enormous white eyes were represented on each side. For without eyes how might a ship see her way?

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The crew, half naked, thin and muscular, with their pigtails tied round their heads, cheered the liner in passing. Their savage faces frightened the passengers. Fishermen in ordinary times, pirates when the opportunity comes, these population of the coast have no habitations on land. They are born, they live, and die on board their ships. The authorities have no claim upon them. They may well be called the free citizens of the sea.

Another day brought them to the mouth of the Yang-tse. The banks, low and grey, appeared just above the line of the yellow, thick waters. The liner went up the Shanghai River. Soon the first houses, docks, factories and other hideous excrescences of modern Western life came into view. A black mist of smoke and dust covered the city.

Monique felt a curious sensation of sadness. It seemed to her that she came down to earth after a sojourn in paradise.

They went to a European hotel, and were received rather coldly until Ming-ni had produced his card. Monique was most astonished. But she was still more surprised when, later on, she saw, at the gate of the Public Garden, a board with the words, "Forbidden to Chinese!" She did not ask for an explanation for fear of offending her husband. But she noticed how the Chinese seemed to be despised in their own country, and was indignant. Ming-ni, answering her thoughts, said simply :



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"We have not enough warships and soldiers. Lower men respect only material strength, and our civilization is based on the hatred of soldiers and battles. We shall have to suffer long before we have brought Europe up to our standard of civilization, and before they abandon their methods and manners of wild beasts."

On the same evening they embarked on one of the Chinese steamers which ply on the Yang-tse. They were sleeping when the steamer started.

In the morning they were awakened by a knocking at the cabin door. A Chinese servant in a long blue gown entered, and in the most respectful manner asked their orders for breakfast.

Their cabin was on deck. Through the open door entered the pure light of a clear, bright day. Along the yellow waters of the river, nearly two miles broad, rose round hills covered with a rusty grass. A supreme peace reigned on these silent and deserted shores. Sometimes a junk with high and narrow sails passed. A pagoda appeared on a promontory, or a temple in the shade of pine-trees. When they neared the big cities, Nanking, Kiu Kiang, or others, the movement on the river was greater. Innumerable little crafts went up and down. On the banks, low houses were built close to one another. The grey battlemented walls of the city rose over the long low line of the nearly flat roofs covered with grey tiles.

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After four days and nights, they stopped at Hankow, and went aboard a smaller steamer. The river was still more than a mile wide, and was covered with junks and boats of every description.

Three more days and nights of navigation brought them to Y-chrang.



## VII

AT Y-chrang they went to a Chinese inn. Monique made there her first attempt at Chinese conversation. Since her marriage she had steadily studied the language, guided and helped by her husband. She had made rapid progress, not being hampered by official methods, to which students in certain universities are indebted for their perfect ignorance of foreign tongues, even after ten years of conscientious efforts.

She was very happy to find herself understood. While her husband went on a visit to the Governor of the city, she coaxed the innkeeper's wife to go and buy her a Chinese outfit. On his return she offered him the surprise of a Chinese dinner-table, together with a fair-haired pseudo-Chinese waiting for him. She was so funny with her dress too short and too small that he could not help joining in her merriment.

When they set off again, they resumed, however, their European dresses, Monique being unable to find suitable garments ready made. This time they hired a solid and comfortable junk, where they enjoyed thoroughly their quarters. They had two cabins formed by varnished and gilded sculptured wood, and of a cleanliness known only to sailors. Little windows opened two or three feet above water. On the

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fore-deck the men worked with the oars or with a hauling-line, or with the sails when the wind was favourable.

In spite of her efforts, Monique had not a full knowledge either of the language or of Chinese etiquette and customs. Ming-ni was thankful that they had kept their foreign dresses. He read in the eyes of the crew and of the passers-by on shore, and knew that they had all the same thoughts.

"These foreigners are mad. They do not know the first word of social relations and righteousness. But as long as they are not dangerous, we don't care what they do or say."

And they laughed when Monique tugged at the hawser with the men at a rapid, or asked questions from the bystanders.

Her love for China became passionate. A perpetual contrast was in her mind between the lives of her friends and her own, between the sad banality of Western streets and the extreme beauty and originality of everything she saw. The landscapes filled her with astonishment and admiration. This large river simmering between the high banks ; the rapids rolling in big waves over hidden rocks ; the distant hills with a grand pagoda perched on some prominent summit. Everything represented itself immediately to her mind in descriptions for her letters to her relations and friends. Without knowing it, her pleasure was not so much to be the spectator of unforgettable sceneries as to see what her



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family and acquaintances had never seen and would perhaps never behold.

They left the river at Krwei-chow-foo for the road. While they were waiting at an inn for a new means of conveyance a servant announced a foreign missionary. A Catholic priest in a black cassock, with long grey beard, came in, and was most surprised when he saw Ming-ni.

"Excuse me," said he in Chinese, "I have been told that two foreigners had come. As I am alone here, I intended to avail myself of such an opportunity to see one of my own countrymen."

"Don't excuse yourself," answered Ming-ni in French. "We come from France, and are very pleased to see you. Pray sit down."

The servant brought a cup of tea. They chattered about themselves and Europe. Then Ming-ni asked the priest for the latest news of the region.

"It is not very good," said the old man; "the people of the province are not satisfied with the construction of the projected railway. They begin to be very excited against foreigners."

"They are quite right," said Monique. "It is really ridiculous to impose these hideous Western customs in such a splendid country."

The missionary looked at her with surprise.

"Certainly very few countries in the world are as beautiful as this one is," said Ming-ni.

"However, the railway, though dirty and ugly, is very useful, especially when it rains. More-

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over, if His Majesty the Emperor (ten thousand times ten thousand years !) has decided on the construction of a railway here, then it is for the best. The authorities, in consulting together and deciding, do their duty as authorities. The people must obey and have nothing to say. If the authorities did not work with the best of their faculties, Heaven would take over the power He has given them, and they would fall helpless."

They invited the missionary to remain for dinner. During the repast he could not help giving to Monique some counsels of prudence.

"You enter now into the farthest part of China," said he ; "the people here have not yet acquired that equal apathy in presence of evil and good which characterizes the modern spirit. Their moral strength and courage are unimpaired. They have very strict principles on what one must do and not do ; they want everybody to act in conformity. When an action seems to them contrary to their code of righteousness, whether it comes from authority or people, they take the law into their own hands and punish at once the culprit."

He told them how one of his colleagues had been killed recently.

"He came from the West, and on the first days of his stay he began to preach vehemently against the ridiculous pretensions of the Buddhist priests to obtain rain by their pagan practices. The people were persuaded that he would



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displease the God of Rain, and they stoned him to death."

"How frightful!" said Monique. "But, after all, he was quite right."

"Certainly he was right," said the missionary. "How could pagan processions have an influence on rain? Here, instructed by previous experiences, we let them offer up their public sacrifices. Naturally, nothing comes out of it. When the whole city has recognized the fact, we announce that we are going also to make prayers. We have a grand procession. Of course, the results are not long in making themselves felt, because the dry season is practically over; the rain comes, and we get many converts."

He retired at last, meditating a letter to his colleague who lived nearest to Ming-ni's birth-place, so that the future children of the young man should, if possible, be baptized.

The travellers started on the morrow. The sedan-chair with its four porters seemed to Monique the most agreeable means of transport she had ever experienced. But the "Oh! Oh! . . . Oh! Oh!" of the coolies and the gentle movement of the chair sent her to sleep for the greater part of the way. Maybe she began to be accustomed to the scenery, the hills, the roads with great stone slabs, the pagodas, the rice-fields, though her enthusiasm remained the same.

Her husband, on the contrary, became more and more anxious. He had nearly forgotten the dangers of travel in that distant part of the

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country, where riots and piracy never cease to alternate or coincide. He had been brought up in the region, and had considered such a state of affairs as normal. Besides, he had always travelled alone, and was not afraid for himself.

Now, for the first time, he experienced the feeling of being constantly anxious for the health and life of somebody else, of having to hide one's fears from them so that they should not know them, and to lie awake in order to watch over them. He remembered now with horror the spectacle he had witnessed when a child of a European traveller who, pursued by insufficiently paid and enraged porters, and, stumbling on the uneven ground, had fallen, and been beaten to death with the long and heavy "pien-tang" with which the men carry their loads.

The population on the road was, happily, fairly calm. In one place only they were insulted by a group of mule-drivers whom they met on a narrow path.

They arrived at last at Chreng-krow, where the parents of Ming-ni lived, in the secluded luxury of their abode, "The Palace of a Hundred Flowers." The young man breathed more freely—this long and difficult journey drew to its end without mishaps.

Monique surveyed with great curiosity this city where her husband had been born. The high gates once passed, they went along the great street which cut the city into two distinct quarters,



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and where all the life and activity were concentrated. The low houses, with a diminutive story under their projecting roofs, presented an uninterrupted vista of open shops, and displayed a thousand different kinds of goods. The golden and sculptured signboards, with splendid ideograms in relief, waved and creaked in the breeze.

It was market day. All the population of the neighbourhood had turned up, some to sell their products, others to buy their provisions ; some on foot, others with pack-animals, wheel-barrows, and other conveyances. The passage was nearly blocked by the motley crowd, chattering and laughing.

As it was in the afternoon, the faces were illuminated by the fumes of the crude native alcohol ; the voices were loud, and the discussions lively.

The bystanders did not pay great attention to the screams of the porters, and several were pushed aside by the shafts of the sedan-chairs. However, the curtains of the chairs were lowered, and Ming-ni had ordered his "chrai-kwan" to put on the blue button, insignia of the dignity of his master. The people, recognizing a high functionary, did not grumble too much.

The porters, on their side, were in high glee to be at last at the end of their hard journey. They had celebrated the day by some extra cups of liquor. They made rough jests to one another and to the passers-by, and laughed loudly. In this state they did not see an old man who crossed

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the street in front of them. They ran into him with the chair, and the old man fell down. Insults and high words were showered on the porters, who had to stop. The poor old man could not get up.

Nothing would have happened, however, if, nobody knew why, a porter had not called :

“ Place ! Place ! for the Grand Men of the Ocean ! ”

At these unlucky words the screams redoubled. A tall man with a red face, certainly half drunk, pulled down the curtain of Monique's chair and howled :

“ The Devils ! The Devils of the Ocean ! The red-haired Devils ! Kill ! Strike ! Kill ! ”

An excited crowd rarely resists an appeal to murder. The screams of “ Kill ! Kill ! ” were repeated by everybody. The porters tried to start, but were held by the crowd. One of them slipped on the shining stone and fell. It was enough. A villager struck him on the head with his stick while he was trying to get up again. Then the bystanders closed on him.

As soon as he saw the chairs held up Ming-ni jumped out, ran to Monique, helped her quickly down, and holding her tightly by the hand ran away as quickly as possible through a small perpendicular street, and immediately doubled through another little alley. In a minute they were lost to view. He had acted so quickly, availing himself of the commotion round the porter, that he was noticed by few people. Some



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stones whistled round their ears, but they ran faster and were alone at last.

"And that poor porter?" asked Monique.

"What are they going to do to him?"

"Kill him, probably," answered he drily.

"But we must go and defend him," said she.

"They are a thousand, and we are two. I don't wish you to be tortured by those drunken brutes. Moreover, they have run over an old man. It is all their own fault. Let us fly home as fast as we can."

Monique could not conceive the idea that they were really in danger. She was also reassured by the presence of her husband. So she said laughingly :

"Well, here is a reception such as they never have in France."

"Oh, it happens sometimes in Paris also. Just remember what happened to those two women who first went out on the boulevards with those hideous tight skirts. They were treated roughly enough, and if they had not run into a house and shut the door they would probably have been killed. Crowds are despicable and dangerous everywhere."

He listened to the clamour, which was not appeased. A man passed them and screamed, "Kill ! Kill !" but was scared by a gesture of Ming-ni, and disappeared.

They went as fast as they could by the back streets towards the Palace. But Ming-ni remembered suddenly that the sole entrance to his

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father's house was on the great place which was crossed by the market street, and the crowd certainly blocked the gate.

He bethought himself of asking shelter from a friend of his father. But who would recognize him after ten years, and especially with his foreign dress?

Their sole place of security was the Palace of a Hundred Flowers.

The fortune and authority of his father, as well as his numerous array of domestics, would stop the riot.

It was impossible to wait in the streets. They were probably being pursued already, and would certainly be discovered sooner or later.

He decided that their best course was to go as near the gate as possible, and then to cross the place without giving the crowd time to think. He communicated his idea to Monique, who continued to take the whole thing as a sort of game of hide-and-seek.

They went accordingly with the greatest caution along the back streets until they were just on the other side of the Palace. Then, holding each other tightly by the hand, they turned the corner of the lane and ran as fast as they could in the middle of a howling and roaring mob. The place was full of people.

It had happened that the porters "chrai-kwan" and servants, seeing the fate of one of them, had immediately tried to get to their place of destination, the Palace. The rioters had



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followed them, and surrounded now the gate which the porters tried in vain to get open.

A huge clamour announced the arrival of our fugitives. The thick wall of maddened humanity bore down upon them. It was too late to go back. They had to cross the crowd and get to the gate or die.

Ming-ni pushed his way mightily among the first ranks of people, who, impressed by his resolution and swiftness, opened reluctantly a way. But they closed behind them, and the other ranks would not open. A villager pulled the coat of the young man and tore his sleeve. Sticks and "pien-tang" were lifted on them. Stones were thrown from behind and struck some people around. A man lifted his cudgel on Monique, who just evaded it in time. Ming-ni, enraged, put his hand in his pocket, drew a revolver and fired it three times in front of him. Three men fell down. There was a moment of terror and astonishment. The crowd opened. He rapidly drew his wife after him. The porters, hearing the shots, understood that their master was there. They made a desperate effort, pulling and pushing, knocking and insulting, and at last the young couple arrived at the closed gate.

Ming-ni and the "chrai-kwan" called the gatekeeper by his name. But the door did not open, and the stones began again to rain on the group. Several men were wounded.

Ming-ni covered with his body his wife, now

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thoroughly terrified. He told his men to try and break the doors open. But in spite of their efforts the heavy wood remained unmovable.

The crowd, afraid of the revolver, did not come too near, but they continued to stone the fugitives. The situation was hopeless. Ming-ni, fearing the worst, retained two cartridges, one for his wife and one for himself. When the mob saw that he did not shoot again, they pressed on them. The fateful moment had come. He gripped his weapon and held his wife close to him.



## VIII

IN the garden of the Palace of a Hundred Flowers, while Ming-ni and his wife entered the city, a sweet and happy peace reigned, as is the rule wherever the useless and febrile agitation of the West has not yet penetrated.

Behind the treble roof of the Great Gate, wide open, the gate-keeper, in a blue gown, sat on a post, smoking, and following with a dreamy smile the games of his two little children on the large grey square slabs.

The first courtyard was shaded by ancient pines, the tortuous trunks of which were the shelter of many nests of squirrels or little birds. The low houses and barns, which were on two sides, were closed, being reserved for the guests' servants on days of ceremony.

A portico with an ornamented roof gave entrance to a second courtyard, also planted with old trees, and there many servants worked in leisurely fashion. In one of the long rooms on the western side, the windows were open and women were working on a broad silk embroidery. Their laughs and chatter were even stronger than the crowings of a group of jackdaws disputing some personal points on the crests of the walls and on the roofs. In another house a furniture

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maker repaired a chair and whistled to the rhythm of his hammer the melody of a popular song. Porters, in another house, were suspending on slings a sedan-chair shining with cleanliness.

The third courtyard, which was the "Cinabar Courtyard," was surrounded by the most beautiful buildings of the Palace. At the farther end was the great reception hall, of which the high and heavy roof covered with grey tiles was supported on columns resplendent with black and red lacquer. As the spring was already advanced, the high panels of trellis-work which formed the front of the hall had been taken away. In the shady depths of the big room shone heavy ebony chairs, high chiselled screens, and rare curios on strangely built cabinets, and a "krang," this large and wide sofa on which low tables are placed.

On each side of the great hall, the buildings were lower. They included the library, drawing-rooms, dining-room, and private apartments of the master.

In the middle of the wide yard a large square pond reflected the trees, the roofs and the blue sky, whenever the five-tail fishes which lived in it did not trouble the mirror of its waters. Between the trees, huge porcelain basins of bright colours, placed on red lacquer stands, held plants, flowers or fishes.

A small door gave entrance to the apartments of the women, each wife having her own pavilions round a courtyard.



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Farther on, were the gardens, so strangely designed and so great that the owner, to his intense delight, still lost himself sometimes in the intricacy of their paths. An artificial mount, surrounded by a dark thicket of broad-leaved banana-trees, was surmounted by a kiosk, from which could be seen the whole extent of the garden, a vista of low roofs, and beyond the crenelated city walls, a horizon of blue hills in the transparent light. At the foot of this artificial mount, was a large pool covered with lotus and nelumbo flowers. A clear brook escaped from it, and furnished many original sceneries under the tall willows, with its red lacquered arched bridges of the sort known as "camel's back."

Nothing was lacking in the charm of this place of delights. The birds, never disturbed, were always fed by the hand of women. They nestled everywhere, and sang without ceasing. In the dawn, they celebrated the daylight by a general concert. Towards midday, when the heat was at its highest and invited all nature to sleep, they still insisted on beginning a melody which they left, however, unfinished. Towards evening, their chattering and excitement resulted in a confused noise, such as happens at the beginning of orchestral displays when all the musicians tune their instruments at the same time.

Towards the east, the gardens were bordered and dominated by the Temple of the Sacred Mountains. The great roof, covered with golden

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tiles, sparkled in the sun amidst the fresh green hue of the high trees. A low wall ornamented with a trellised gallery, separated the sacred precincts from the gardens.

Roses of the most brilliant hue covered the wall, at the foot of which peonies of a hundred different species were rivals in beauty. One could see there the "Golden Pavilion," with innumerable rays of fire on a purple background, the "Green Butterfly" cut into a thousand little blades, the "Blue Lions" with large blue stripes on the violet petals, and the "Elegant Genius" pink and golden.

At that moment, in front of the peonies, a long thin old man with a white beard smoked meditatively a pipe, the diminutive bowl of which was at the extremity of a bamboo stem more than a yard long. A young girl with a laughing face, clad in the blue linen of servants, was standing beside him.

"Aya!" said she. "How beautiful are your flowers! My mistress may well be proud of her father."

"Well," answered the old man softly. "I imagine that the Lord Chen will be pleased."

"Pleased!" repeated the indignant young girl. "The flowers you grow for him are his pride! You don't forget that it is because of your talents that he has changed the name of his abode into that of Palace of a Hundred Flowers?"

"Those peonies," pursued the old man, who



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did not listen to her, "have really an intensity of colour which no others possess."

"And if the Lord Chen was not filled with respect for your admirable art," went on the other hotly, "he would not deserve that the genii should let him have you as gardener—you, the celebrated poet who was received in the first ranks of the "Entered Scholars" at the examinations of the capital."

"Hush!" said the old man, waving his hand. "Don't try to awaken my literary ambitions. They have slept for thirty years, and left me happy and careless. I grow the most beautiful flowers of the region. I make sometimes poems which are really not so bad. There lies true happiness. Help me rather with those ladders. I must tie up again these roses."

"True happiness! True happiness!" grumbled the little maid, while she placed the light bamboo ladders against the wall. "But in the meantime," she said, "your daughter Orchid grows up. She is the prettiest girl in the city. She is sage and virtuous. If you had an official position, the Little Elder Sister would certainly find a beautiful and fortunate husband, while now you see nobody."

The old man, who was already up a ladder, stopped, musing.

"My daughter Orchid, it is true. You are right. It would have been better for her perhaps if I had asked for an official position. . . . But no, you understand nothing of the ques-

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tion. You speak like a little servant who goes to market holding a basket, and who would like to go there in a sedan-chair. The Sage has said : 'Beauty, virtue, moderate desires have always their reward. For to possess them is to possess what is best in the world.' "

"If," said the girl, "one could add some dishes of swallows' nests, of biche-de-mer and bears' paws, the reward would be more apparent."

"Red Peony, my child," said the old man sentimentiously, "you are stupid. It is easy to know that you are a woman. For you, beauty consists in an enormous figure and a face like a moon. And your happiness is solely to make your neighbours die with envy . . . your neighbours' wives, above all."

"Hi !" replied the other, unabashed. "The proverb is not wrong which says : 'The neighbours' envy is a mirror in which we perceive our own happiness !' "

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"Do not speak any more. You make me tired. You had better go and fetch your mistress. And do not forget that because of my unimpeachable life we are held in such great honour that, owing to our most wise laws, Orchid my daughter, the daughter of the old gardener, may be chosen for the harem of the August Emperor (may he live ten thousand times ten thousand years !)."



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At which words the girl knelt down respectfully, and, bowing, said laughingly :

“ My deepest regards to the father of our Empress ! ”

The old man, half angrily and half laughingly, climbed down the ladder, and lifted up his long pipe, saying :

“ Run away, impudent little object ! If not, I will have your ears cut away for speaking thus lightly of His Imperial Majesty, this Car of Light.”

The little servant stood up and fled laughing. Turning her head to see if her master followed her, she did not perceive a large fat gentleman who stalked ahead, clad in a gown of brocade. He was upheld under the arms by two men, and smoked a short silver pipe, the bowl of which was mounted over a reservoir of perfumed water, ornamented with precious stones. At each in-drawn breath the smoke gurgled through the liquid, and arrived sweet and fresh to the mouth. The round face of the gentleman beamed with contentment. A short pig-tail of grey hair hung from the back of his head, the forehead being clean-shaven.

Red Peony, looking at her master and laughing, did not see the new-comer, and threw herself unwittingly on his vast breast. She screamed with surprise, while the other uttered an exclamation of pain. However, he smiled at the girl, who murmured excuses.

“ Run away, little one,” said he playfully.

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"If I catch you, I will pull your hairs off one by one."

Then speaking to the old man :

"Well, good friend Wang ! Here is your slave up to some mischief again. Ten thousands happiness, O Wise Elder Brother !"

The gardener, on seeing him, rectified his dress and made as if he was going to kneel.

"I knock the ground with my head," said he. "And I wish you peace and prosperity."

The other one stopped him, and made in his turn as if he was going to kneel.

"Get up ! Get up, O Wise Friend ! I knock also the ground with my forehead."

"How could I stand and allow you to kneel in front of me?" said he hastily.

"Then let us put aside the rites, O Sage Wang ! And how are you?"

"Owing to your favourable influence, my health is good. And that of the Grand Man Chen?"

"Your protection has favoured me."

While they were exchanging such words the two men, one thin and long, the other short and fat, walked towards the peonies.

"And your last marvels?" asked Chen. "Have you been able to obtain the rare shades of colour that you tried to produce?"

"Here are the most unsuccessful results of my efforts," answered the other, showing his plants with an assumed modesty.

Chen lifted his arms up, and his round face



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showed the admiration with which his mind was filled.

“ O splendour ! O beauty ! ” said he. “ What a freshness in the tints ! What an infinite gracefulness in the forms ! You are really the Genius of the Gardeners. I shall have a temple built for you, where your statue will receive fitting sacrifice down to the sixtieth future generation.”

He stopped suddenly with an inspired look, the finger on the temple.

“ But I feel the enthusiasm of poetry——”

He counted on his fingers, and in an uneven and rythmical voice began :

“ The peonies are red,  
The tuberoses white,  
The sky is blue ; the shade is black. . . .”

He stopped again, repeating “ the sky is blue, the shade is black,” then he turned a face full of melancholy towards Wang.

“ And after, O Wise Friend ? ” asked he. “ Alas ! my poetical enthusiasms never lead me very far. I seldom pass the third verse.”

The old man had listened to him with a polite attention. He bowed.

“ I see, I see,” said he. “ Your poem is admirable. I will try to finish it, if you will excuse my stupidity.”

Then, nearly without any effort, he went on in a simple and harmonious tone, and with perfect rhythm :

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"The Palace of a Hundred Flowers  
Fills with perfumes the whole city,  
From the glory of its bowers  
The scents give us a new sense of beauty,

"The peonies have a smell of honey,  
And the strong odour of the tuberose  
Exhales itself as an offering  
From the dark shade to the blue sky.

"The lotus empurpled reflects on the great pool  
The pride of its heavy beauty,  
The jasmine and the rose, these daughters of summer  
Trouble the young girls, dreaming at their windows.

"When the heat of the day is passed,  
The Palace charges the evening breeze  
To carry to the Gods, spring of all power,  
The soft souls of the dead flowers."

The fat Chen had listened to him, nodding his head. He exclaimed :

"Marvellous ! Marvellous ! O Wise Friend, you give me wonderful inspirations ! It is only beside you that I feel capable of great poems."

Then turning towards one of his servants :

"Did you hear ? You will not forget a word of this masterpiece. I must recite it this evening to some friends, over a few cups of lukewarm wine."

Then, speaking again to Wang, with emotion :

"Oh, poetry ! What an unequalled exercise for great brains ! My mind was troubled when I came. Here I am now with the lightest heart."

"Your mind was troubled ?" asked Wang



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with sympathy. " Evil spirits " (he spat quickly right and left, murmuring " may they all perish ! ") " have not been seen in the Palace."

" Oh no ! My ancestors keep them always away from us. No, if I must tell you all, my home is untenable, and my First Wife renders my life very bitter."

" Has the Virtuous Wife some hidden illness? Women are often of a sour disposition when their health is not good."

" Not at all," answered Chen despondently. " That would be nothing. She is simply anxious to see our eldest son, Ming-ni, who is on an official mission in the country of those Western savages—how do you call them? The Fa-lang-hsi."

" Yes—or Fo-rang-sai. . . . But it is quite enough to upset one to know one's son is among such wild and uncivilized people."

" Don't you think that, being the father, I have a right to be as anxious as she is? Nevertheless, I know how to conceal my emotions . . . and I am very anxious. He has sent a message by the lightning-wires to announce his return. Since then, the moon twice has grown and waned, and he does not come."

" O Lord Chen ! " answered sententiously the thin old man. " You cannot ignore that the winds and waters are capricious and changeable. If your distinguished heir has known how to escape already the dangers of the wild countries where he has seen twice five times the spring

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blossoming again, he will know how to come back unscathed to the place of his Ancestral Temple."

"Such is my feeling. But if it is easy for a scholar to keep under control his own heart, it is more difficult for him to appease an irritable wife. However, everything will end happily, I trust."

"I enjoy in advance," said Wang, "the marvellous reports of the Young Lord on the customs of these barbarians, their houses, their food, and their rudimentary civilization. They are sometimes ferocious, it appears!"

"It will be interesting to listen to him, sitting in one of the kiosks in the garden. The more that, in one of his last letters, and in a few words as befits such a negligible affair, he says that he will bring with his baggages a foreign woman, the same, probably, he had taken in his house some time before."

"Really," said Wang with curiosity. "A foreign woman? It will be curious to watch her, especially as the rites do not forbid us to watch the females of animals and savage people."

"I ask myself if those barbarian women are pretty," said Chen pensively. "I nearly regret not having asked him to bring one back for me. I must say that if I did not, it was only because of the Thorn-bush, my First Wife. She has an invincible prejudice against what she does not know and against strangers in particular. Do you remember how she ordered her servants to



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strangle that little Annamese, that a friend coming from the Far South had brought me? ”

“ You mentioned that little incident to me. I had myself a most unfavourable idea of all the Devils of the Ocean. But it appears that they are not all alike, and my ideas have much changed since I see nearly every day the foreigner—an Ing-ki-li-she he calls himself—who lives in the temple beyond that wall.”

“ Ma-ken-hsi ! The one who bores holes through the hills for the cars that spit fire? He who is about to begin the new road with two iron ruts? ”

“ Yes. He is himself certainly civilized. He knows the rites, and every night the lamp which lights his open book is still lighted when I get up at midnight to cover my delicate new plants.”

“ I have the greatest interest in his welfare,” said Chen, “ and I would be very sorry if anything happened to him. You know, perhaps, O Elder Brother, that I answer for his life to the Governor of the city? If he dies, I must die . . . or at least pay a heavy fine. Accordingly I have him guarded day and night. This is also a great preoccupation for me. It appears that the stupid people are discontented with this project of constructing a railway. They say that the Dragon of the Earth will be irritated with such works. The mule and cart drivers also are very angry, fearing to lose their trade. The Governor has already posted everywhere pro-

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clamations and strict orders of peace, under penalty of death. In spite of everything, riots have already taken place."

"Bah!" said Wang disdainfully. "The ignorant people are angered and appeased as the milk on the fire swells and diminishes."

"But sometimes the milk overboils," said Chen.

"The will of our Sacred Emperor has always been and will always be obeyed by those sheep-like people; they are not interesting," said Wang. "But speaking of the barbarians, has the Young Lord written to you about the strange customs for marriages in the Far West? Our neighbour Ma-ken-hsi affirms, and I cannot believe him, that the parents of the bride, far from receiving in divers gifts the value of the young woman they give away, are, on the contrary, obliged to offer at the same time a great sum of money. People without money being thus unable to get rid of their daughters."

"My son has made allusion to something of the kind, but I cannot believe it. For, if it was true," added the fat old man, shaking with laughter, "it would mean that they have solved the problem of marriage, softening the woman by money, and giving the antidote at the same time as the poison!"

"Oh, Grand Man Chen! How can you!" said Wang with sad indignation. "Are not the women the sweetness in our life? What should we do without them?"



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"True ! true !" said the other, still laughing. "But you speak easily on the subject. You have only a daughter, who is known as a perfect model of virtue, wisdom and agreeable temper."

"My daughter is silly and without grace or beauty," answered politely the gratified father. "But she has studied the doctrine of the Sage. She knows her duties towards other people."

"My Thorn-bush of a Wife knows above all the duties of other people towards herself . . . and of other people towards her family. She is also furious because that barbarian woman my son has with him has not given him a child."

"A barren woman is certainly the malediction of a family. How, without children, is the ancestral worship to be carried on? How may the family, the basis of society and of the world, develop and prosper? Hence the obligation to keep second wives in order to have as many children as possible."

"Of course, Wise Brother," said Chen. "But it is not the sole motive. Your love for flowers has guarded you against other loves. You ignore the pleasure it is to be surrounded by several second wives, outvying one another in kindness and attention for their master, bringing cushions for his head, preparing with a light hand the opium-pipe with the strong perfume."

"Yes, yes ! I know," said Wang. "A grand poet has sung of such pleasures."

And he recited harmoniously :

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"In the shade of a hall with sumptuous ornaments,  
The Emperor, dressed in gold and purple, reclines;  
All round, his wives are standing, and they dare not  
move—

In the great silence they keep back their breathing.

"He opens his eyes. The favourite slowly  
Rises graciously, and her dress half open  
Uncovers her shoulders of pink and white jade,  
Similar to snowy peaks in the rosy dawn.

"Her long and light hand has run on the great lute.  
The birds, jealous, interrupt their songs to listen—  
The Lord is sitting up, troubled, looking at her.

"Her voice rises and falls, tender, soft and moving . . .  
She has sung. The silence again fills the hall.  
The Lord listens still, dreaming, with tears in his eyes.'

"But," added Wang, "these are pleasures  
which I ignore indeed. My wife was virtuous  
but without great beauty. She has left me for  
the Inferior Regions, below the Nine Springs.  
Since that I have been free."

"Happy ! Three and five times happy !" said  
Chen fervently. "All the same," pursued he,  
"I am curious to know this foreigner, and I  
hope that the women of the Palace will be kind  
to her. Has not the Sage said, 'Be kind to  
people from distant regions' ?"

While he was pronouncing these words the  
fair head of a Westerner appeared above the  
wall of the temple. His blue eyes were soft ;  
on his fresh, clean-shaven face a grave and  
scholarly look made him appear to be older than



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he really was. He was dressed in a khaki jacket and riding-breeches.

He bowed to his neighbour, who had just perceived his presence, and said in correct Chinese :

“ May the home of the Great Sage be for ever praised ! May his doctrine be studied all over the world and bring with it reason and peace ! O Great Man Chen, ten thousand happiness ! O Elder Brother Wang, ten thousand happiness ! ”

The two men bowed, waving their closed fists up and down and repeating :

“ Ten thousand happiness, O Lord of the Ocean ! ”

The foreigner leant on the wall and said :

“ I passed along this wall, dreaming, when a favourable wind brought to my ears the never-enough-praised words of Krong Foo-tse. I could not resist the desire of greeting two sage scholars.”

The two men bowed again, and Chen said in a gratified tone :

“ Humble student as I am, I feel happy to greet you. Is your health always good ? You know that I have the greatest interest in your person.”

“ Thank you ! Thank you ! ”

“ And your works ? ” went on Chen. “ Can you go about without difficulty ? The imbecile people have not opposed you in any way ? ”

“ Not at all.”

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"It appears that there is an increasing opposition against the carts-that-spit-fire and the iron roads."

"So I have been informed," answered the Westerner. "But I have found everywhere smiles and good words. I should have certainly spoken to you if it had been otherwise. I know that your kindness goes as far as to answer for my security. If only for you, I would do everything in order to prevent any accident."

"My life has no importance," said Chen negligently. "But my family would not recover from my loss."

"I willingly believe it. . . . But what are the wonders I see at the foot of the wall? Another miracle of old Uncle Wang, our great artist the whole city admires!"

"Your praises go far beyond the truth," answered the old man.

While they were thus speaking, an increasing noise came to them on the still evening air. Chen listened a moment anxiously, but politeness ordered him to add a word. He said:

"Are not they prodigious? Our Wang is an Immortal, and will some day fly away in the sky on a bright cloud! Look at those famous 'Blue Lions'!"

"Nothing could equal their beauty," said Mackensie. "These splendid flowers must inspire you to compose many poems!"

"Not at this moment. My heart is anxious and my spirit troubled. My eldest son, the Little



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Dog of the House, whom I expect every day from your Precious Country, has not yet come. And I wonder if he will be much changed."

"But, Great Man," answered the foreigner, with a slightly offended accent, "I assure you that we are not so uncivilized as some people think. Certainly our recent culture could not rival the most ancient civilization of your glorious nation. Nevertheless, among us there are artists, poets, and even illustrious gardeners that kings have honoured!"

And he saluted Wang, who bowed in return.

"However," said Chen, "you have adopted our customs here. My son has probably done the same thing over there."

"All the cultures resemble in what they contain of true civilization. Your son, having learnt the true moral principles, has applied them in Europe with a different costume and in a different outward manner, but the principles are the same."

While he was speaking the noise redoubled. They heard distinctly the reports of a firearm. They stopped and looked at each other.

Suddenly, precipitate steps resounded on the gravel. At the turning of the path appeared an elderly lady, stout and of authoritative manner, and walking as fast as her dignity allowed her. Her tight feet gave her the step of a child walking on stilts. The flowers adorning her shining hair were shaking. The flying sides of

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her long pale mauve silk jacket showed a great part of the thousand pleats of her blue skirt. Numerous servants of both sexes followed her and spoke confusedly.

The old lady stopped short on seeing Chen, and said to him indignantly :

"Of course ! You are here doing nothing ! I have been looking for you everywhere !"

Wang had kneeled hastily, and, lowering the head, he said ceremoniously :

"Ten thousand wishes of peace and prosperity to the Lady of the Palace !"

The lady kneeled rapidly and said :

"Ten thousand happiness !"

Wang bowed again.

"A thousand wishes of long life and good health !"

The First Wife seemed exasperated, but she answered, however :

"Ten thousand wishes and thanks . . ."

Then she stopped and got up.

"Enough ! Let us forget the rites. We have no time for that. There is a riot at the gate of the Palace—the stupid people want to kill passers-by, and the stones are raining on them. The passers-by want to take refuge here."

"I don't want them," said Chen immediately.

"Tell them to go away."

"The gate-keeper was just in time to close the door. . . . Where is this absurd man? Where is he?"

The old gate-keeper, who at the beginning



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of the afternoon blinked dreamily at his two children, jumped out of the group and knelt. He began :

“ Having received from Your High Wisdom the mission. . . . ”

But the First Wife interrupted him, and stamping impatiently, said :

“ I don't want your silly politeness ! Hasten ! ”

The gate-keeper gazed at her with amazement and went on :

“ Appointed by order. . . . ”

“ Won't you hurry up, yes or no ? ” screamed the old lady madly. “ You will make me die in a fit of anger ! ”

“ The Very Small was standing, guarding the Precious Entrance, when suddenly a group of men came near, followed and stoned from behind by the mob. I was just in time to bolt the door before they were at the threshold. Disregarding the danger, I looked through a chink. A few minutes after, I saw two foreign barbarians coming through the crowd and shooting right and left, killing several hundred people. . . . ”

“ Foreigners ? ” exclaimed Mackensie. “ I must run to their help. ”

“ Stop ! stop ! ” screamed Chen with anguish. “ Stop ! It's most dangerous ! Don't forget that I am surety for you ! ”

“ But we must save them. Tell your man to open the door quickly. ”

“ Do you hear ? ” said Chen to the gate-keeper. “ Obey at once ! ”

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The man looked at the old lady and did not move. She had made such an authoritative gesture as would have been almost sufficient to stop an express train going at full speed. Then she turned on her husband.

"How now? You want the door to be opened? But if they are killed here, we shall be ruined. And if the mob comes in, they will burn and loot everything. Here is a good example of your ignorant weakness, and of your culpable indifference for my health and my life. . . . I am going to faint. . . ."

Chen did not relish being thus scolded in public. He turned savagely on the servants :

"And who were these foreigners? Did you ask them their names, their birthplace, the motive of their presence here? "

The gate-keeper, responsible for the visitors in ordinary time, replied humbly :

"I did not think of asking for their visiting cards, though they called me by my name. How could they know me? They are certainly magicians."

"If they are magicians," said Chen, who had found a ground for conciliation with his wife, "they must stay outside. If they are killed, you must drag at once their bodies right in the middle of the place, so that nobody should be implicated in their death."

Mackensie, indignant, interrupted him.

"But, Great Man, have your gate opened at once. I will go myself if it is necessary."



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“ No ! no ! Don't go, above all ! ” said Chen, who did not know what to do.

He was spared the pain of finding a solution, for at the same moment the clamouring increased and seemed to come nearer.

“ Everything is lost ! ” screamed the First Wife. “ The mob has broken the door and is in the Palace. . . . Let us fly away ! ”

“ But where? Where? ” asked Chen.

“ Here ! ” said the old lady, climbing up a ladder. “ We will go in the temple.”

Chen climbed at once up the other ladder, while Mackensie, on the contrary, stood on the wall and prepared himself to jump down. The servants stood in a group, howling and trembling, while Wang tried to prevent them from walking on the flower-beds.

## IX

MING-NI, covering his wife with his body, was asking himself desperately how to save her. Monique was naturally courageous. Protected by her husband, she regained her spirits as well as her curiosity, and looked about her at their assailants, always held in respect by the revolver, and at the door.

At that moment she saw, lying at her feet, one of those heavy bars of wood which are used to fasten the doors. It had probably been left outside when the gate-keeper had hurriedly shut out the fugitives. She showed it to Ming-ni and asked if it could not be used as a sort of ram to break the door.

"Too small," said Ming-ni, who had looked at it. "It would need a much bigger one to burst the whole thing open. . . . But," said he suddenly, "if it is here, one of the small doors has no bars."

He went with his wife to one of the small side entrances which are always opened either side of the gateways. They dragged after them the log. Ming-ni assured himself there was no bar. Then lifting the heavy piece of wood, they knocked as hard as they could at the place where Ming-ni knew the small wooden lock to be. At



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the first impact, they heard an unmistakable noise. The lock was not strong enough to resist. They redoubled their exertions, and at last the door flew open. They dropped the log and ran in, followed by the porters shouting with joy. The mob, frustrated from their prey, roared. The most excited were not restrained by their respect for Chen, and entered after the fugitives. But the majority knew very well the difference between killing an unknown foreigner and invading the palace of a powerful local financier. They stopped and went back silently to their affairs, most of them being even wise enough to return straight to their homes.

Ming-ni, his face covered with blood, his clothes half torn, held always his wife, whose dress was also in a pitiable condition, but who was not severely wounded. He led her at once through the two first courtyards, crossing to a small door leading to the gardens. He hoped there to double quickly and enter his father's quarters, while his pursuers would still be lost in the intricate paths he knew so well.

While he was crossing the garden-door, he saw two or three servants running in front of him and screaming :

" Great Man, the rioters are in the Palace ! We can't hold them back ! "

He called them, asking where his father was. But they ran the faster, always shouting. From their screams he concluded that they were going

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to the place where the old Chen was, and followed them.

Thus they were soon in the middle of the weeping and trembling servants, in front of the family. Chen was sitting on the wall, trying to hoist himself up. The First Wife had missed a step of the ladder with her little foot and was in a painful and, it must be added, difficult position, in which she managed somehow to retain much of her dignity. Mackensie stood on the wall, revolver in hand and ready to shoot if the foreigners were touched.

The habit of a lifetime was stronger than the feeling of danger. Ming-ni knelt ceremoniously at the foot of the ladder where his father was, and began knocking the ground with his forehead.

Monique stood amazed at his behaviour. She had never seen him before in such a posture, though she knew very well that it was the customary form of salutation.

The old couple, however, did not recognize their offspring. The First Wife, red with anger, howled at the top of her voice :

“ Get away ! Devils ! Get away ! Devils of the Ocean ! Why do you come and trouble me in my house ? ”

And turning her head so as to see the rioters who had stopped, as frightened of Chen as of Mackensie's pistol.

“ And you murderers ! Bandits ! Robbers ! Get away at once ! If you stay a minute more



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I will have you all cut into a thousand pieces, I will have your bowels pulled out ! Get away ! ”

The less excited ones started without waiting for another injunction. The others still shrieked “ Kill ! Kill ! Strike ! Strike ! ” but with a disheartened voice. Another sharp command of the old lady convinced them that it would be dangerous to stay any longer, and they disappeared as quickly as possible.

During this time, Ming-ni had continued to kneel at the foot of the ladder. Monique, standing beside him, was divided between great efforts to restrain her laughter at the sight of her fat, short father-in-law perched on the wall, and a growing feeling of shame to thus expose to the curiosity of so many people her beautiful, unfastened fair hair, and her dress all torn and awry. As to the First Wife, she still screamed in a high-pitched voice :

“ Are you going to leave us alone, O Devils of the Ocean ! And for you,” added she, speaking to the servants, “ throw them outside ! I don’t want people of that sort here ! ”

But the “ chrai-kwan,” an old servant of the house, had come forward and was also kneeling, knocking the ground with his forehead and saying :

“ He is your Precious Heir, the Young Lord, O Great Nurse ! He is the Young Lord.”

“ I am your humble son, the Little Dog of the House, your Ming-ni ! ” said the young man.

“ Here I am, O Father and Mother ! ”

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The attention of the two old people was at last attracted by these words. They looked at Ming-ni.

"I recognize him," said Chen, from aloft. "Ten thousand happiness, my dear child! Ten thousand happiness!"

"How now," said the old lady with stupefaction. "Is it you? Where is your Chinese robe? And your hair? Stand up! Stand up!"

The old man descended heavily from his position on the ladder, and going near to his son, embraced him, whispering in his ear:

"This woman is charming, you little scoundrel! But you are not very nice in that foreign disguise."

"How can you thus shake him?" interrupted his wife indignantly. "Don't you see that he is wounded?"

She had at last extricated herself from the ladder. She patted her son tenderly on the back, and told him:

"She is hideous, that woman! Why did you bring her back? And she has no children? She must be ill."

Monique, however, getting impatient, came near to him and pulled his sleeve.

"Don't you think that it is high time to introduce me to your parents?"

Ming-ni took her hand, bowed to his parents, and said:

"Here is the humble servant of your house."



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Then to his wife :

"Kneel down quickly and knock the ground nine times with your head."

Monique was taken aback. She knew, of course, the forms of greeting used in China, but she had never realized that she might be expected to perform them. The habit of a lifetime, a sort of absurd shame to show herself in such a position, perhaps also the contrary spirit which lurks in all women, prevented her from complying with the order of her husband. She came forward, holding out her hand.

The First Wife, who did not know Western customs, looked curiously at the hand thus proffered, and turning to her son, she asked :

"What does she want?"

"It is the most respectful form of greeting in Europe, mother. They shake hands."

Chen had observed the scene. He held out his plump fingers, saying :

"Ten thousand days ! Be welcome in our house !"

The First Wife shook hands reluctantly, saying :

"And now go and wash your wounds. After that you will change and put on decent dresses. The Fifth Wife of your father, who is very tall, will give some gowns to this girl. Then we will go to the Hall of the Ancestors in order to announce your return in front of the Sacred Tablets."

And while Chen was chattering with Monique,

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the old lady, walking behind with her son, said to him :

“ I don't admire very much her manners. You will tell her to kneel down like all well-educated people ; and if she refuses, you must have her whipped.”



## X

AFTER the crowd had retired from the gardens, Wang had set his numerous assistants to work in the most damaged parts of the shrubberies and flower-beds.

He went himself with his daughter and their little servant to see what he could do for his peonies, some of which had been more or less trampled on. The poor old man ran from one to another, almost in tears, and lamenting his sad destiny.

"Don't complain of your fate," said the little servant. "Your flowers are spoiled, it is true, but your daughter is alive."

At which words, Wang looked at his daughter, and his eyes were instantly filled with a wonderful admiration and tenderness. His looks passed like a caress on the long, soft and gracious oval of Orchid's face, on her thin and long nose, on her hair, elegantly tied in a high knob ornamented with flowers, on her eyes above all, black, lustrous, full of life and charm between her thick and curled eyelashes. She was dressed in a narrow and short pink jacket, tied at the waist by a carmine scarf, the broad ends of which were floating. Her skirt of a hundred colours had as many pleats, which opened and shut at every

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step, each revealing a new tint. Her long, thin hands, with her nimble and supple fingers, touched delicately these magnificent flowers, straightening the stems, and taking off half-broken leaves. All her body was animated with a lively grace, full of life, but without strength.

"She is right," said she. "Let us be thankful to have escaped the riot. When I think that those murderers were already in the garden! They had only to cross this cluster of trees and they were in our house. I was there, not knowing what to do to save ourselves, grasping already a knife to kill myself if they had attempted to touch me."

"Yes," said Red Peony, "but the first one who would have passed the threshold would have had his eyes plucked out by me!"

"Everything was lost," answered Wang, "when suddenly the mob stopped."

"Without any doubt," said Orchid piously, "we owe our escape to the shade of my mother. She used always to come here in order to see you at work. Her happy and mysterious influence has saved us."

"It is certain," said Red Peony, "that their sudden flight is strange. Did you see anything, O Master?"

"Nothing at all," answered Wang. "I tried to protect my flowers."

"Men never see anything," grumbled the little servant.



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"I should think they were afraid by the threats of the First Wife," added Wang.

"Maybe," said Orchid. "In any case, it is my duty to offer a sacrifice to my mother in this place, where her influence has manifested itself."

"Do, my dear child, and at the same time ask your mother to help you to find a good husband."

"We have time to think of that—I am not yet nineteen. But you, Red Peony, run quickly to our house and bring back the table for the sacrifice. The sun is touching the horizon. We approach the hour in which the Shades are liberated."

The little servant went away as fast as her little legs would carry her. The old man, however, looked at his plants.

"I think that we have nearly finished here. I will go and see if my assistants have done their work. Then I will perhaps go and see the Lord Chen."

"Go, father," answered Orchid softly. "I will wait for you at home."

When the old man had disappeared behind the bushes, the young girl, left alone, looked dreamily at the scenery.

The roses on the wall were only patches of colour. Beyond them the pines and cypress of the monastery erected their dark forms. The temple itself retained the last rays of the sun, and the yellow tiles of its high roof were like a mass of burning gold.

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The path in front of Orchid went down between groups of flowers and bushes straight to the carmine framework of a bridge, and beyond, to a small kiosk built on a little elevated island in a pond. Glazed blue tiles crowned the quaint building and shone in the red light of the sky. The clear foliage of bamboos made a happy harmony with the silvery grey of the willows and the dark purple of beech-trees.

An immense peace filled the atmosphere. One could hardly hear in the distance the noises of the city. Then a deep bell was slowly struck in the near temple, sending forth large waves of beautiful sound.

Orchid felt a delicious emotion take possession of her soul. Occupied all the day with her household duties as well as with the study of the Classics and the Poets, her whole life had passed in innocence and purity between her father, who spoke only to her about poems and flowers, and her little servant who adored her.

On that evening, still upset by her emotion of the afternoon and by the remembrance of her mother's passionate caresses, she perceived with peculiar softness the beauties of such a marvelous sunset. She felt herself in communion with Nature, whilst her mind was haunted by poetical images and words in keeping with her mood.

Red Peony came back at last, carrying with difficulty a small oblong table on which was the



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Sacred Tablet in a sculptured stand. There were also incense burners and small cups holding white rice, butter and chips of meat.

The small servant helped her to arrange these sacred vessels in proper order. Then she said with indifference :

" I have met with somebody to-day, Little Elder Sister."

" Ah ! And whom did you meet? "

" The servant of the Man of the Ocean who lives there, in the temple on the other side of the wall."

" I hope that you did not speak to him," said Orchid.

" Oh no ! "

" Then what happened? "

" He spoke to me," said Red Peony. " Oh, very respectfully indeed ! "

" You did not listen to him? You walked faster? "

" Of course I followed the rites. . . . But I heard what he said."

" It is very bad," said Orchid. . . . " And what did he say? "

" If it is so bad, I must not repeat it," answered the little servant teasingly.

However, as her young mistress did not seem to pay attention, she went on :

" Since you insist, I will tell you that he greeted me most politely, saying : ' The Little One is called The Badger. My Elder Sister will perhaps allow me to carry that heavy basket? "

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"We are neighbours, and the rites order neighbours to help one another."

"You did not give him your basket, I presume?"

"Oh no," answered Red Peony. "But he had already taken it."

"You ought to have taken it back from him."

"I thought of it, but he spoke of his master, and I forgot everything."

"I hope that you are not in love with that foreigner . . . that you have never seen him?"

"And why not?" answered the little servant. "He is a most scholarly person, and very beautiful besides. I have seen him . . . and you also, you have seen him."

"I have seen him? You are mad! Where could I have seen him? I never go out."

"Little Elder Sister, I know that he has seen you, and I know that you have seen him. I was there the other day while he was looking at you over the wall. I noticed that you were conscious of being looked at."

"Are you going to hold up your little snake's tongue? My little Red Peony," added she tenderly, "you must not say a word about it to anybody. I was dying with curiosity to see a foreigner, and how is it possible to see without being seen? You know that he is very beautiful, though he has not the long dark hair of our race."

"He is beautiful and wise and scholarly. He is the Phoenix and the Dragon."



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"You worry me," interrupted Orchid in an irritated tone. "Let us proceed with our sacrifice."

She knelt before the table. Red Peony, sitting on her heels, touched a great lute and began some simple and grave harmonies.

Orchid leant forward, knocking the ground with her forehead. Then she placed her long thin hands correctly on her knees and began to sing in a sweet, pure and deliciously musical voice the magnificent and traditional "Hymn to the Shades," the simple words and the harmonious melody of which have been transmitted from generation to generation from the most distant antiquity.

"When the last rays of the day  
Have given Nature to the triumphant night,  
The shades of those who had our love  
Hover round us, timid and shy.  
They try to help us, but they show themselves  
To faithful souls only.  
They are here, round us, waiting  
For a thought, for a call, their sole means to be  
mixed  
To our pleasures, to our sorrows."

While she was singing Mackensie appeared above the wall. Beside him was his servant, who told him softly :

"Did I not tell you that you had better come, O Great Man? As soon as I heard the singing I warned you. Was I wrong?"

"Certainly not, Little Badger," answered the

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master. "What we are doing now is, however, most incorrect. But how can I see her without being incorrect?"

"You know very well, O Master," said the servant with authority, "that the rites may be followed or skipped over. To-day, for instance, I spoke to the maid."

"Ah! And what did she tell you?"

"That her name was Red Peony."

"Red Peony! What an exquisite name! and how well it suits her!"

"No, no!" interrupted the other hastily. "It is the maid who is called Red Peony. The mistress's name is Orchid."

"Still prettier!"

"I think that Red Peony is nice enough. But I am only an illiterate person."

In the meanwhile, Orchid had again knocked the ground with her head, waving little bunches of incense-sticks in order to frighten away the evil influences. She sang again:

"O come near me, Beloved Shades!  
As a certain sign of my love for you,  
Here are my gifts! May their fumes please you  
May their perfumes seem sweet to you!  
Here is the wine in the three-foot cup!  
Here is the rice! And this the paper money  
Which, burnt in the fire, is transmitted to you."

\* She got up, and taking a huge heap of imitation ingots of silver and gold, she burnt them. The Shades being spiritual, the odour of the



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dishes is sufficient to feed them. The smoke of the burnt paper money gives them all the currency they need in the other world, where fortune is as respected as in this one.

Mackensie leant towards his servant and said :

“ What else did she say? ”

“ That her mistress was neither married nor engaged.”

“ Good ! ”

“ But she was not far from being in love with somebody.”

“ Aye ! Without doubt, one of those young Chinese lords. . . . Every hope is lost ! ”

“ She told me that it was somebody.”

“ But who? . . . Speak ! ”

“ Hush ! They will hear us.”

“ Who? ” asked Mackensie again, after a silence.

“ A neighbour.”

“ Which neighbour? ”

“ A neighbour who looked at her over the wall while she was walking in the garden.”

“ Villain ! You try to torture me ! Would you like to feel if my stick is heavy or light? ”

“ If you beat me I won't speak any more to the maid. Hush ! This time she has seen us.”

In fact, Red Peony had lifted her head and seen them.

She answered with a little smile to the sign that Little Badger made her. In the meanwhile, Orchid pursued her sacrifice, offering, each in its

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turn, the cups of rice and meat, and bowing several times.

"Be attentive, will you?" said she a little sharply to the other girl. "Give now the other incense-sticks and light them. We are going to bid good-bye to the Shades. I am afraid that the song of a cock would disturb them. Let us hasten."

Then sitting again, the hands on her knees, she sang:

"O Sacred Shades! Good-bye!  
May my modest offerings and my pious wishes  
Please you! In return, hear my prayers!  
Don't abandon me! Come and see me in my dreams!  
Be there always to guard me.  
For without truce or rest, the Evil Spirits are after  
us. Protect us!"

While she finished the ceremony, Mackensie leant towards Little Badger.

"How can I speak to her? The opportunity is excellent. But it is very incorrect."

"If it is so incorrect, better not speak to her."

"Yes, of course," said Mackensie; "but I shall try to."

"I don't know if she will accept it. But you are a cultured man. You must find out a means."

"It is very difficult. Suppose she is angry?"

Orchid was arranging the cups on the table. Red Peony, helping her, said in a very low voice:

"They are here!"



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"Who?" said the surprised girl.

"Our neighbours from over the wall. Don't look at them."

"Let us go at once," said Orchid, without moving.

"It would be a real pity, the night is so beautiful," said the other tentatively.

"Yes, the moon shines and the cool breeze singing in the bamboos invites us to poetry."

"It is a marvellous night!"

"As marvellous as that described in that poem of my father's. Do you know it?"

"Which one?"

"Er—this one:

"The immense vault of Heaven  
Is carved out of dark jade;  
A silver stream goes across,  
Suffusing it with its milky glimmer.  
The stars above and the men below  
Have conquered the night with their million lights."

Mackensie from the top of the wall heard her words, and recognized a poem of old Wang, which had been posted all over the city by order of the Governor as an example for writers and poets of the region. He seized the opportunity thus offered, and sang, in a fairly correct tone, the second stanza of the poem.

"From the garden in which the moon pours its splendour,  
Come up to me heavy perfumes,  
The flowers have closed one by one their calices  
Whispering 'I love you!' to the zephyr."

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"He knows our poetry," said Orchid in a low voice to her little maid. "And what a beautiful voice!"

"Let us go now, shall we?" asked Red Peony teasingly.

The young man went on with the poem, moved by the sight of the girl and by the hope of speaking to her.

"The passer-by is charmed and stops,  
He feels his heart all swelled with love.  
Will he dare to lean his head,  
And say also 'I love!' in his turn?"

Orchid had listened to him. She had been brought up in the solitude of the garden, and had hardly ever seen a man. The meaning looks of the foreigner had troubled her many times, for more than once she had seen Mackensie watching her from over the wall. She knew that her duty was to go away at once, but that knowledge did not prevent her from singing the following stanza:

"Where is the flower that ever refused her perfume?  
She exhales her soul, happy to be loved,  
Until one day, fainting and worn,  
She drops for ever her dying petals."

While she sang, turned towards the gardens, Little Badger had silently climbed over the wall and down a ladder towards Red Peony, who started at once up the pathway, as if to run from



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her follower. In a minute they were lost to view behind the bushes.

Mackensie imitated his example. But he was not as nimble, and he was still on the ladder when the young girl turned round and saw him. She stretched out her hand imploringly.

“ Oh, don't come down ! I am lost ! ”

He stopped.

“ Don't be afraid,” said he, softly and tenderly ; “ we are guarded, and nobody can see us. I pray you, don't run away. I have lived so long in the unconscious but so troubled expectation of the day when I should meet her whom I had always seen in my dreams. And here you are, shuddering and afraid. Don't run away. Have no fear. I will never do anything you do not wish me to do. See, I have stopped. Let the passer-by intoxicate himself with the flower he adores.”

Orchid still fought against him and against herself.

“ The passer-by has come from afar,” said she in a low tone. “ He will pursue his way, forgetting what has been for him but a moment's pleasure. And the flower which has bloomed for him will shrink and die solitary and dishonoured.”

Feeling that she was already giving way, he climbed hastily down the ladder and took her hand.

“ Since when do husband and wife separate? Have you ever seen the swallow leaving his

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mate? If I must go away, you will come with me, beyond the waves of the azured ocean, towards the Western lands. There you will see the towns where husbands are the slaves of their wives, and work for them solely. You will see shops as big as whole cities, where everything is made for them, their pleasure and their beauty, and we will be always together."

She lifted up her face towards him with such an expression of sweetness, confidence and tenderness, that the young man was moved to the depth of his soul. She said simply :

"Real love does not care for all the marvels of the world. All the happiness, all the joys are in the soul of those who love sincerely and entirely."

"You love me, then," inferred at once Mackensie. "Is it possible?"

"And you?" answered she. "Your eyes, as blue as the sea, are not they as treacherous as she is? Are you not an Immortal? Your eyes burn like fire."

"I am not a spirit," answered he tenderly, "but a man who loves you, and will always love you. From this minute and until the end comes we will always be each for the other what the baby is for the grandmother, the sister for her brother, the mother for her child."

"Don't speak any more. What does it matter?" said the girl softly. "When a hurricane blows and throws the water of the sea on the shores, everything is carried away. When



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the gale of passions blows in our soul, it breaks everything also—respect of our parents, education, prudence even."

While she spoke, he had gently taken her other hand in his. She submitted to the fate which gave her such a passionate emotion. Making no other effort to resist the blind impulse of her own nature, she abandoned herself to her destiny.

The great clear moonlight cast on their shoulders a veil of silver brocade on which the shadows of the leaves drew changing designs. The heavy perfumes of flowers and earth intoxicated the lovers, who were carried away by their feelings. The forgetfulness of everything in their present happiness gave them, as it gives to all delicate and sensitive souls, an incomparable felicity which nothing could surpass.

No noise troubled now the serenity of the night. As he beheld her dreamlike beauty, he could hear the rapid sound of her fluttering heart. He drew her towards him and closed his arms round her slim body. She lifted her face. Their lips met.

All trembling and dizzy, they separated, holding one another by the hand, silent. Their feelings were so deep and in such complete sympathy that no words could have ever rendered them.

At that moment, Little Badger and Red Peony came back hastily. Steps were heard in the silence. The little servant led her mistress to the house, while the others climbed over the wall.

## XI

THE news of the return of Ming-ni spread like wildfire. His foreign wife proved to be such an attraction that any person who might claim even the remotest relationship or friendship with one of the inmates at the Palace, came at once to inquire, and if possible to see and touch.

Monique was overpowered. She had been obliged already, on the first day of her arrival, to pay the customary visits to each of the relations of her husband, her father-in-law, her mother-in-law, the five secondary wives of her father-in-law (whom, by the way, she thought at first to be cousins or sisters) ; then the sisters of her father-in-law and of her mother-in-law, and the wives of their brothers ; then the families of the sisters and brothers-in-law of her husband's parents, etc.

For a month without stopping, she was occupied from ten o'clock in the morning until evening. When night came, she had to receive the calls of those she had visited, and of all the families of the younger brothers and sisters, and also of the innumerable visitors and friends.

Each degree of relationship has, in China, a special name. The elder and younger brothers of one's father are not equally uncles ; they are



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“po ” or “shoo,” “po-po ” or “shoo-shoo,” according to their age. Special names existing for every sort of aunts and cousins, of brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law.

The families are very numerous. The habit of having many second wives, each with a special title, and many children each with a special denomination, increases the difficulty to an extent which cannot be dreamt of in our countries. People, moreover, marry very young, and continue having children until they die, so that it sometimes happens that one has a grand-uncle younger than oneself.

Monique could not master at once such complications. She made frightful mistakes, and in a few days had all the womenfolk of her family against her.

She was indignant when she learnt that she had paid a visit to the second wives of her father-in-law, women who, according to her Western notions, were simply the mistresses of the old man. It needed all the tact and patience of Ming-ni to prevent her from openly cutting the poor ladies.

The perfect politeness and interminable formulas of courtesy imposed by Chinese rites appeared to her at first as the most admirable invention of civilization. But when she had to go through it day after day, she nearly went mad, and found it the most terrible trial for patience that had ever been invented.

On the first night, and every night after,

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she had her dinner with the women of the family.

A wall of the dining-room was replaced by latticed frames covered with translucent paper, through which the moon poured her light.

The big hall was furnished with a long table of black and gold lacquer. Heavy carved chairs of lacquered wood were disposed ready for the diners. Along the back wall, were hung many beautiful pictures and quotations from the sages or the poets. There were small tables on which stood rare curios or vases containing flowers.

The whole dinner was set at once on the table. A multitude of big bowls containing food of every description were placed haphazard on the shining surface. Ham, however, considered as the honourable dish, was placed in front of the oldest lady.

The unshaded light of thick candles, set on the points of heavy brass candlesticks, reflected itself on the lacquered table.

There were innumerable women, young and old. The grandmother of Mrs. Chen presided at the dinner. She was a little deaf, and had a small wrinkled yellow face beneath beautiful white hair tightly pulled and arranged. She was a sore trial for Monique, as she kept night after night asking the same questions on Western food. The use of forks was the subject of many inquiries on her part. She could not understand how one was able to use such extraordinary instruments



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when little sticks were so much more easy to handle.

The five secondary wives were also there, very pretty and very young, trying in vain to keep the severe and grave attitude which is considered as correct and even prudent in the presence of old people. The sisters of Ming-ni and his sisters-in-law were also there, as well as a great number of relations, friends or concubines.

Politeness at table consists in constantly filling up one's guest's bowl with the choicest morsels. One's own sticks are used for picking such dainties out of the common dish and conveying them to their destination. Some people go as far as introducing them by force into their guest's mouth, but this is considered as overdoing the thing. It is a great insult not to eat all that is thus offered. Monique knew that, and nearly died of indigestion on the first night.

Some dishes tried her severely. Such were the famous preserved eggs, kept sometimes for three years in the earth before being put on the table. They have the aspect and strength of some Western cheeses of high and strong reputation. Small fried worms necessitated also a great self-restraint on her part.

Happily, at the beginning and end of every meal, servants offered her a small serviette, dipping it in a chiselled gold basin full of boiling water. Everybody passed thus a serviette over his face, after which the servant poured very hot water on the hands out of a long, thin gold ewer.

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When, at length, dinner was finished, tea was brought in, and the white-haired lady gave the signal for dispersal by putting her cup to her lips.

There are no after-dinner social entertainments in China. As soon as tea is served, the guests depart. Monique enjoyed the proceeding and found it highly satisfactory, even thinking of trying to introduce the practice in her own country when she would be back.

Monique returned quickly to the pavilion which had been prepared for them. It was situated in the gardens, and surrounded by dense shrubbery and bamboos, which secluded it from prying eyes. An open verandah ran round the little edifice. On the ground floor were their reception-rooms and library. On the second floor, their bedrooms and bathrooms.

Every night Monique and her husband had been alone but a few minutes when visitors were announced. Her knowledge of Chinese being scanty, the pleasure of such visits was soon exhausted. A fixed and meaningless smile was on her face, and she kept bowing incessantly to the compliments she guessed rather than understood.

In the morning she got up with difficulty. Her body and even her mind were sore and numbed. However, she was still very happy and interested. China had not disappointed her.

The ladies of the family were less and less enthusiastic about Monique and about Western races and customs. The fact that she had not



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yet presented an heir to her husband was considered in itself as bad. Her many mistakes made things worse.

Ming-ni felt troubled when he saw the increasing hostility to her. He tried to enlighten her on the dangers she might have to face. He asked her to avoid going in the shops, and rather to wait for the merchants to come to her house with their goods, as is the custom for ladies of rank. But she did not see any harm in what she did, and went on with it.

They had several discussions on the subject. She was not able to understand the real and grave aspect of Chinese life. She considered the whole thing as a subject for a musical comedy. Everything was a matter for pleasantries. For her, China was what an old French poet described :

China is for me as a land in a dream.  
Everywhere there are lakes where play some fancy ducks  
On the bank where slumbers a great bronze buffalo,  
The high pagoda of porcelain is built,  
Showing off its colours on the blue of the sky.  
Light is, over there, always sweet and pure,  
And always the full moon shines in the night.  
The fruits in the orchards are always good and ripe,  
Ploughmen are all dressed in magnificent robes,  
They follow in the fields with an elegant step  
Their bullocks which a child with the head shaven pricks.  
There, in a palace with splendid jade columns,  
We will drink together many cups of slag wine,  
Whilst little singers, standing round us,  
Will start a high-pitched chorus,  
Playing on the lute and the drum.

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She was filled with this spirit when Ming-ni received the order to go and pay a visit to the Governor of the province. The Ambassador had recommended him for the rank of Minister attached to his Embassy, and the promotion had been signed without delay. The Duke of Krong had thus found the means of calling back his secretary, whose excellent services he had not been able to replace. He knew Ming-ni's value, and paid for it. The custom, in China, is not to give faithful services in exchange for promises which may not be fulfilled, neither to pay in advance notoriously incompetent and inefficient people which can never be useful.

Ming-ni was thus obliged to go to the capital of the province in order to receive his official investiture of rank. The distance being great, and the means of transport slow, his absence would probably last two months.

He thought of taking Monique with him. But gangs of highwaymen devastated the region. The foreign appearance of the fair-haired young lady, as well as her free manners, were, moreover, very dangerous, if not for their lives, at least for the reputation and future promotion of the diplomat. He decided to leave her at the Palace of a Hundred Flowers.

This decision he found very hard to take. But, for a true disciple of Krong Foo-tse, Reason dominates always the wild impulses of feelings.

He announced his intentions to Monique. She was very sad, and could not help showing it.



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The whole family were deeply shocked by such a lack of education. A Chinese, so as not to trouble the mind of his friends, will always smile with an air of happiness when he tells them that he has had a great misfortune, such as to lose a parent or a child. It is only on certain occasions and at certain moments that the rites authorize manifestations of sorrows. It is thus recommended to orphans to faint several times during the burial of their parents.

Such compression of real feelings does not diminish them—far from that. A great many of the people who suffer thus without a word contract a sort of languor. They have the greatest antipathy for everybody and everything. They are unable to eat and drink—they stay in bed until they die, or until the subject of their sorrow should disappear. A low fever burns them day and night, and no medicine can stop it. Foreign doctors call such an illness "neurasthenia." Chinese doctors call it "se y che ping"—"illness of the thoughts and feelings."

Monique did not contract such an ailment, but she remained silent and always sad. At meals she hardly opened her mouth. She became even irritable. She went out more often alone and on foot, hoping to banish her sad thoughts by the sight of the streets always full of passers-by chattering gaily, or by visiting shops of embroideries and silk materials. But she was soon tired of it, and stayed in the gardens.

She made thus the acquaintance of Orchid,

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whom she met by the peonies, helping her father in his delicate work. The unbounded love of Wang for his daughter touched her.

One day at dinner she spoke of the gardener, and quoted what he had said of his daughter. "She is a poet, a gardener, a true sage, and with that as beautiful as the celebrated Si-she."

The First Wife, who seldom spoke to Monique, asked her now, on the contrary, many questions on Orchid.

"Oh, oh!" mused the old lady. "I did not know this girl was as beautiful and gifted as that. I should, however, have guessed it. Wang is one of the glories of our city, and the greatest poet of the region. I must see her by myself. You will profit by seeing her often," said she aloud to Monique.

"The daughter of a gardener?" asked the young lady, astonished.

"Gardener to-day, to-morrow a Viceroy if it pleases His Imperial Majesty (may he live ten thousand times ten thousand years!). Anyhow, a living example of all the virtues and the most respected man in the city. The Governor always returns his visit on New Year. I would not be astonished to see him a 'Cedar in the Forest of Brushes,' which would give him the rank of Minister of State and a Prince."

"But—a gardener?"

"His work has nothing to do with his merits and his high personality. Our station in life



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is given to us by Fate, but our moral and intellectual value alone is meritorious since they depend on our personal efforts. The Sage has said : ' Those who, understanding naturally the nature of all things, go on, however, working and thinking, are true Sages. Those who, not being as well gifted, work and succeed, come after. Those who work always but never succeed, still come after. The lowest degree is reserved to those who never make an effort to attain virtue, but live like animals in the lowest material thoughts and pleasures.' "

## XII

TWO months had elapsed. A messenger had just come, preceding Ming-ni by a few hours only. The whole Palace was astir for the return of the new dignitary.

The Old Wang, tired with his exertions of the morning, was taking a little rest on the large "krang," half bed and half sofa, which is the principal piece of furniture in every Chinese home.

He slumbered peacefully, a book in his hands, when Red Peony entered and woke him up.

"A servant asks if you will receive the Lord Chen," said she.

"Let him in," answered Wang, without moving.

"But the Great Man comes on an official visit," objected the little servant.

"Oh! Then he must not come in," said Wang hastily, jumping out of the "krang." "Tell him to wait, and then give me quickly my hat and my official dress. How now, you have not yet come back?"

Red Peony ran into an inner chamber while the old man tidied his hair. She returned after a few seconds, bringing a long gown of dark violet silk with a small pale blue collar



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and sleeves of the model "horse hoofs," and a large gold and coloured embroidery on the chest and back. She held also a pointed straw hat covered with red silk plaits, and surmounted with a crystal button.

"Well," said Wang, when he had put on his official costume, "now open the door."

A servant who was on the other side of the door saw it open, and perceiving Wang ready in the room, screamed pompously at the top of his voice :

"Please ! the Great Man is expected !"

Wang, adopting the official gait, stalked with dignity to the left side of the entrance, balancing carefully his shoulders and arms. A sedan-chair appeared beyond the low wall covered with flowers which ran round the house. It turned in a small path leading up to the house, and was deposited by its four stout porters just in front of the door.

Chen came out of it, lowering the head and lifting the foot, as is necessary for such an operation. He was dressed also in his official costume. On his hat was the coral button, decoration of the dignitaries of the Second Degree.

The two old men made a deep curtsy to each other, bending the right knee very low and touching the ground with the left fist, while their right fist and left leg were placed behind.

"Peace on you and your house," said at last Chen.

"I rely on your influence," answered Wang.

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"Please come and illumine with your presence my despicable hovel!"

"How could I dare?"

"Come in, I pray."

"I dare not! I dare not!" said Chen, going in at last.

But he stopped immediately.

"Take the highest place," Wang hastened to say. "Sit in the best place," added he, showing the place on the right of the sofa.

"Certainly not! I must sit in the lowest place."

"How could you do me such an injury! I knock the floor with my head. Don't refuse me that favour."

"I must obey your orders, O Lord Wang! But you make me forget the rites."

With a sigh of satisfaction he dropped at last into the place he had been shown.

"I stand in order to serve you," said Wang.

"In that case I will stand also," answered the fat man, moving.

"Then I must yield to you in everything," said the other at last, sitting on the left side.

There was a short silence. Chen turned his rubicund face towards his host.

"Well, friend Wang, how are you? I mean," hastened he to correct himself, "is the Lord Wang in good health?"

"Your precious friendship has protected me, O Great Man! And yourself?"

"Always very well, thank you."



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While they spoke, Chen's servants had entered behind and now surrounded him. One held the pipe, another lighted it, another held a fan which he waved gently. Red Peony had brought two dainty tea bowls, and lifting their fine lids, had poured boiling water on the leaves.

"And the Precious Jewels? The Inestimable Treasure, your First Wife? And the Incomparable Lords, your Sons?"

"The female of the house and my little puppies are well. And the valuable ornament of this noble palace, your daughter?"

"We humbly receive your thought!"

Chen lifted the cup of tea to his lips and drank a little. Wang imitated him.

"I must not waste your precious time, O Great Maternal Uncle! I must deprive myself of a society of which none is the equal!" said Chen.

And he stood up, his host following his example. They went slowly towards the door.

"Notwithstanding," said Chen, stopping, "I have something to tell you . . . O Elder Brother."

"Please explain everything."

And both sat down again.

"Dear friend and elder brother, I must put aside the rites and speak plainly. May I?"

"Certainly, yes, please!"

"The Honourable Marriage Intermediary who came yesterday to see you has told us that your charming daughter was neither engaged nor the subject of any promise."

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"Perfectly true," said Wang.

"And that you would have no objection to seeing her married to a young man of honourable family if he possessed at least the literary rank of 'elegant talent.' May I go on?"

"Certainly, yes. Everything is correct."

"Then I must officially tell you that the Honourable Intermediary had been sent by my First Wife and myself."

"I am very honoured, and I thank you both."

"To-day," pursued the fat Chen importantly, "I have come to ask you if you would consent to the marriage of your daughter with my son Ming-ni. We should be most delighted and proud of this union!"

"This is a great honour for my family and for myself, O Elder Brother!" answered Wang gravely. "And my ancestors up to the twentieth generation will be most happy. I accept with joy such an honourable husband for my daughter."

"Then everything is settled!" said Chen, with satisfaction.

"Yes. . . . There are, however, some points which I must mention. Your son has brought back from Europe a native wife."

"Ah! Don't speak of her to me!" sighed Chen. "My Thorn-bush hates her, and of course I am considered as responsible for all her mistakes and forgetfulness. My life is really too bitter. I don't find any taste in the lukewarm wine. All women weary me."



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"Yes, but what about the foreigner?"

"Your daughter will be First Wife of my son. She may do as she likes with this foreigner—sell her on the market, or whatever she deems best."

"It is a fact that your son has married her according to the customs of those barbarian tribes. Such a marriage does not exist for the sage laws of the Flowery Nation."

"She is but a favourite slave," pursued Chen. "And I must say that the fancy of my son for her yellow hair is easy to understand. But it cannot last very long. Pending the day when he will have wearied of her, we shall install her in a distant pavilion, and we will not allow her to come into the house. She is too ignorant of the rites. Life is impossible in such conditions."

"Without the rites," said Wang sententiously, "men would be like dogs, always growling and always ready to fight for a fleshless bit of a bone."

"Moreover, she is sure to bring great difficulties on our house. She is always going about alone on foot, in the city, among the population."

"Is it possible? Is she not a little mad?"

"Without doubt, for she has not the slightest feeling of honour. Another woman would have killed herself a long time ago rather than submit to the outrages to which the First Wife subjects her every day. She does not even seem to perceive them, and, of course, the Thorn-bush is all

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the more enraged. Moreover, she has no children, and that is grave. So that, in order to uphold the honour of our name, we thought to ask your help and your consent to such an honourable marriage as that we have just now settled."

"You honour me too much!" murmured gratefully the old Wang.

"Now, as you have said, we think that this barbarian is a little mad. My son is so submissive to her whims that we are afraid to let him know of this marriage with your daughter beforehand, lest he should upset our plans."

"Most wisely thought!" approved the other, nodding.

"If we celebrate the marriage in a few days, she will learn of it. He will tell her, and we shall have dreadful scenes. What do you think of celebrating the marriage to-night? My son will arrive just in time, and it is quite customary to send invitations to the witness on the same day."

"Well," mused Wang, thinking, "there is nothing contrary to the rites in that. It is perfectly correct, and nobody can say a word. Then let us proceed at once with the different ceremonies. At first the most important act, the exchange of the billets of the eight ideograms."

"I have brought the red paper for the billets."

And the fat man drew from his high velvet boot a portfolio which he opened. He took out a folded sheet of red paper covered with golden



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flowers and gave it to Wang, who went to a table. There the poet-gardener took the "four treasures of the writing"—that is to say, paper, brush, water and ink-stone. He put on his large round spectacles bordered with tortoiseshell, and delicately rubbed the brush on the ink-stone.

"Let me see," said he. And he wrote: "Orchid . . . born in the hour of the Hens . . . in the day of the Horse . . . in the moon of the Plum-trees . . . in the year of the Buffalo."

"Only nineteen," said the guest, standing up. "Here is the billet of my son."

The two men, each holding with both hands the billet of his child, knelt in front of each other. They bowed deeply several times, and having exchanged the little booklets, bowed again and stood up. Then they both put the papers in their high boots.

"Now that the marriage is concluded," said Chen, "I must return home to settle the last details and prepare the house so that the young bride will be able to cross the threshold according to the rites. . . . Have you spoken to your daughter?"

"How could I do so when nothing was arranged?" answered Wang.

"Quite right! One must not draw water out of the well if one is not certain to drink it. It troubles uselessly the well. On my side, I have not written to my son. Directly he returns I will tell him to put on his official dress. How-

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ever, could I not see your daughter and offer her my congratulations? ”

“ Certainly, yes. Red Peony,” said Wang to the little servant, “run and tell your mistress to come.”

The maid, who had witnessed all that scene with a dazed stupefaction, went to the door of the women’s apartment, and came back a few minutes after with Orchid.

The young girl was most astonished to be thus called. In spite of the great intimacy between her father and Chen, it was not customary that the owner of the Palace should ask to see her. She went to the guest, dropping a deep curtsy, and saying :

“ I wish all peace and happiness to the Great Man ! ”

Chen stopped her immediately.

“ Stand up ! Stand up ! Charming child ! ”

And speaking to Wang :

“ She is exquisite ! When I used to see her, still a little girl, running in the garden with her short pigtail interwoven with red threads, I did not dream that she would grow to be as beautiful as she is.”

“ Little girls grow. Flower buds open,” answered the flattered old man.

“ Come nearer, my child ! What a perfect complexion ! And her teeth when she smiles ! Real grains of rice ! ”

“ But, father,” asked Orchid, in a shocked voice. “ You let me——”

“ Yes, quite true. You must be surprised. I



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have not had the leisure to tell you. Be happy ! We have given you in marriage."

" In marriage? " asked Orchid, stupefied.

" Yes, in marriage. The billets of the eight ideograms are already exchanged."

" But to whom? " asked she again.

" To my eldest son," said Chen. " Sit down, my charming daughter, and don't be afraid. He is very gentle and beautiful. . . ."

" My dear child, you must ' kow tow ' to your father-in-law. The rites must be observed."

Orchid knelt mechanically, and repeated the great salute which she had learnt, as all the little girls learn it.

" I knock the ground with my forehead, O father of my husband ! I will always be your faithful servant, your help and your consolation. I consider you as the equal of my father since my husband is your son ! "

" What an admirable education ! " cried Chen, helping her to get up. " My dear child, I will always be a father to you and love you as my own daughter, since you are the wife of my son."

Then turning towards Wang :

" Ah, dear friend ! You may well be proud of your daughter. Very few women nowadays might without preparation recite the formulas that our sage ancestors have determined for all the circumstances of our life. My son will be very happy. The First Wife will adore you, my child. My house will become at last a celestial abode of peace and pleasures."

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"These are very exaggerated praises," answered Wang, with an assumed modesty.

"Not at all. They are the expression of truth. But I must let you speak with your father and prepare yourself for the ceremony, my child. . . . For she is already my daughter without ceasing to be yours, O Elder Brother!"

"The father of the husband must be loved above all," said ceremoniously the thin old man.

"Well, good-bye! This time I start in earnest. Don't accompany me."

"How could I forget the rites to such an extent? . . . You have tired the horses of your coach!"

"Not at all! Do not come!"

On seeing their masters standing, the servants had rushed to the door. In the midst of the general agitation, the porters brought the sedan-chair near to the threshold. Chen lowered his head and lifted his foot and succeeded in getting into the chair. He waved affectionately his fists up and down, while Wang bowed correctly.

The sedan-chair had hardly disappeared when Red Peony shut the door. Orchid, still in a state of blank amazement, said to her father:

"But, Tieh-tieh, it is not possible! I am not married!"

"Don't be afraid of it, my child, the marriage is concluded."

"She is afraid lest it should be concluded," interrupted the little servant, "and without warning. She has not even seen her husband."



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"Silence, you silly girl! You know very well that the rites forbid the affianced couple to see each other before the ceremony."

"But, father, I know very well that the custom is to conclude the marriage of one's children without warning. However, you might have asked my opinion, or told me that you had a match in view for me."

And throwing herself on the "krang," she burst into tears.

"Now! now! be calm!" said the annoyed father. "I perceive that the surprise, the joy of this great event. . . ."

"It is not the joy," said sadly the poor Orchid.

"Certainly not, it is not the joy," added Red Peony with indignation. "My poor mistress! Who could have believed that you would be treated in such a fashion. Aya!"

"How? Not the joy?" asked the astonished old man. "But you marry the best young man of the province. He is learned, he is healthy and beautiful. He is young, he has a great position and a considerable fortune. His family has a very good reputation . . . though his father is not a great scholar, he is an excellent man!"

And he patted the shoulders of his daughter, who still wept.

"Ah, Tieh-tieh!" said she. "I am too unhappy! I am going to throw myself in a well! But can you not undo this marriage?"

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"Undo the marriage! Do you think of it? The billets of the eight ideograms have been exchanged. It would be a frightful scandal. We should be dishonoured and ruined."

"Then I am going to throw myself in a well!"

"And she will do it," affirmed Red Peony. "And I will throw myself in after her."

"Those females will drive me mad! Reason has nothing to do with them!" grumbled the old man. "Now, what do you want?"

"I don't want to marry. I will go in a temple, cut my hair, and become a 'ni-koo.'"

"A priestess of Buddha! You! Oh! oh!" mused Wang. "I have not had great experience, but I always heard it said that when a woman refuses to marry a good man, she has a great wish to marry another man. Is it that?"

"Of course," interrupted the little servant. "You imagine——"

"Be quiet!" said the young girl, wiping her eyes and sitting up. "Yes, it is true. I love somebody, and I have promised him to be his wife."

"You! My daughter!" said Wang, lifting up his arms in despair. "You! You have seen a man without my consent! You have spoken to him! You have promised to be his wife! You bring dishonour on my white hair!"

"I was there," said Red Peony. "And, after all, there is no importance in it."



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"But, at least, nobody has seen you? Nobody knows anything about it?" asked anxiously Wang.

"That goes without saying," answered disdainfully the servant. "We are not stupid enough to dishonour ourselves."

"Then, if nobody knows of it," said the relieved old man, "it does not exist. Why do you speak of it?"

"Because I love him, and I want to marry him," answered obstinately the young girl.

"But you are already married. . . . And, after all, who is it?"

"You know him—a neighbour."

"A neighbour? I know him?"

"Yes. . . . It is the foreign lord who lives in the temple."

"A foreigner!" cried the old man. "My daughter in love with a Barbarian of the Ocean! The daughter of a scholar of the First Degree! Where are we going to, O Sage Krong Foo-tse? And what would you do in such a case?"

"And I know what they say about this husband," said Red Peony wrathfully. "He has brought back from Europe a First Wife, and my mistress will be her servant."

"You know nothing. He has not married that woman according to our laws. He is not married to her, and the great red sedan-chair of the first wives will take my daughter away to-night."

"To-night!" exclaimed the two girls at the same time.

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"To-night!" answered he.

"In such a case I am going away," said Red Peony, walking to the door, "and I will never come back!"

"Let her go, she is mad," said Wang to his daughter, who had jumped from the sofa in order to hold back her servant.

Red Peony made as if to resist, and said in a low voice:

"We must prevent that at all costs. I will go and tell him."

Then loudly:

"I will stay, but you will never find me in any other place than in the kitchen."

"All the better," grumbled Wang.

The little servant went out, banging the door.

"Yes," said the old man, "the sedan-chair will come to-night. The gifts, the jewels and the dresses will come in a few minutes. You will see, when the silken robes are in a heap on the table, when the golden bracelets, the rings sparkling with precious stones, the necklaces and the pearl head-dresses glitter in front of you, you will forget your foreigner."

"No, father, I shall not."

"Moreover, all this comes from the wrong you have done. If you had followed the rites, if you had not concealed everything from me, if you had told me that you loved somebody, I would have said so to the Honourable Intermediary."



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"I know I was wrong," said she humbly. "But it happened so suddenly and unexpectedly."

"And this foreigner is not so bad. He is as learned as your husband. He would have been a very respectable son-in-law. But what can I do? Rites have been made to prevent such painful circumstances from occurring. If we do not follow them, we must take the consequences of our acts, we must accept our fate when we cannot do otherwise. Now, you had better wipe your eyes and prepare yourself. The marriage gifts will come in a minute. As for me, I will go and see to my flowers. They are more reasonable than many human beings."

And troubled with the sorrow of his daughter, he went out, not forgetting to leave his official dress and hat on a chair.

### XIII

ORCHID remained a long time on the "krang," leaning pensively her smooth forehead on the white jade fingers of her hand.

"What can I do?" she mused. "If the billets of the eight ideograms have been exchanged, the marriage is concluded. My father and the Chen family alone know it, it is true, together with the Honourable Intermediary. But it is impossible to break the contract. My father would be dishonoured. There is nothing to do, we must keep up appearances. After the marriage, one day, discreetly I will die. So many young women do it that nobody will be astonished. Alas! I was so happy! And now I must die, and I don't want to die. How unstable and changing everything is! One day poor, rich on the morrow. In the morning happy, desperate in the evening!"

The tears ran slowly down her face. Suddenly the door was opened. Mackensie entered with Red Peony. He rushed to her.

"Orchid!" cried he, "my love! Is it true? They want to give you in marriage to another man? But it is impossible! We have exchanged our promises, we are engaged to each other."

"Don't come near me," said Orchid, disen-



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gaging her hand from his grasp. "Don't come ! I am married ! Alas ! we are lost !"

"Married ! It is not possible. Your father would have told you beforehand. Even in China it is not done as quickly as that."

"It was necessary to hasten everything for fear of the foreign woman," said Red Peony. "They do not wish the Young Lord to be influenced by her, that is why the presentation to the witnesses will be made this evening as soon as the new husband returns."

"There is nothing to do," said Orchid sadly. "The billets have been exchanged, my marriage is concluded."

"Concluded, but not celebrated," objected Red Peony. "This foreign lady might have something to say."

"Nothing at all," answered Mackensie. "Her marriage in Europe has made a Chinese of her."

"Alas !" cried Orchid, "we are separated ! We shall not be able to go away together, all alone ; ignoring everything in a long, happy dream ; having as only pleasures you my own, and I yours. I shall not be able to link my arm in yours, enjoying everything ; happy to see you, to listen to you ; intoxicated by the happiness coming from you, and which I would have tried to give you back. We shall not go together, your cheek to my cheek, silent."

"No ! no !" answered Mackensie. "Our dream has only just begun. We will live through it, I promise you. Our happiness will flow

*The Pearl*

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along, like the pure waters of a stream, lost a moment under the ground, and coming out to the sun again. For ever we are tied to each other. The eternal stars have been our witnesses. The breeze has carried our promises to the Shades who people the Night. The moon, through the foliage, has covered you with the embroideries of a silver veil. You are my wife, and I will keep you."

Orchid, in listening to his voice and his accents, had forgotten her marriage, and let him hold her in his arms.

Red Peony had gone discreetly and prudently to the door. She interrupted them :

"Hush ! Somebody ! Go away ! Quickly !"

Mackensie, fearing to compromise Orchid, ran to the door. But Red Peony stopped him.

"No ! no ! Not there ! It is too late ! Hide yourself somewhere ! Come !"

And she pushed him quickly into the women's apartments, the door of which she shut on him.

"Just in time," said she. "A minute later, there would have been a scandal. It is the foreign lady who comes, Little Elder Sister. Keep her here while I try to help him to escape unseen."

She disappeared in her turn in the women's apartments. Orchid went slowly to the door, her graceful carriage showing to advantage the thousand pleats of her variegated skirt.

Monique was already on the threshold. She entered, saying hastily :



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"Peace be on you, O charming Orchid ! I came as fast as I could in order to speak with you about an extraordinary story. . . ."

"Peace be on you !" answered the girl.

"Yes, a story which concerns both of us."

"Pray be seated," continued Orchid, showing her a place on the "krang."

"My husband, who is absent, comes back this evening. Just now a servant we had with us in Europe told me the most incredible story. He said that you . . . that my husband . . . in short, that my father-in-law gives to-night a reception in honour of your marriage with my husband. Do you know anything about it? "

"My father has just informed me that he had concluded to-day my marriage with the eldest son of our Lord Chen," guardedly answered Orchid.

"Impossible ! My husband is married to me. . . . Yes . . . it is true. In China, polygamy is legal. But it is maddening ! Never will I allow such a thing ! And my husband ! What will he say when he is informed of it? "

"He does not know anything yet, they told me."

"He does not know anything? Then how do they suppose that he will let himself be married to you to-night? "

"But his marriage has been concluded already this morning. His father and mine had exchanged the official documents,"

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"Married without knowing it? It is going a bit too far. I cannot believe that."

"However, you have stayed long enough amongst us to know that the parents alone decide a marriage and conclude it. Sometimes they celebrate the wedding of children still in their cradle."

"Then my husband is married to you," said Monique, laughing in spite of her anxiety. "Then you and I, we are . . . how could I call that new relationship . . . co-wives? . . . And the marriage is definitive?"

"Yes, to-night, after the presentation to the witnesses, the marriage will be definitive, alas!"

"But you say 'alas,'" asked Monique. "Did you not wish this union?"

"Wish it? Certainly not! But what can I do? Parents are the absolute masters of their children. They can sell them, kill them . . . children must obey . . . and die if they are not happy."

"Then you don't love my husband?"

"Love him? Certainly not!—Oh! excuse me! I did not mean to be rude. But I have never seen him."

"Then if my husband, you and I, we do not want this union, nobody can force us into it."

"The marriage is already concluded," repeated Orchid wearily. "And to-night there will be the presentation to the witnesses."

"Yes, my husband has told me about it. The



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bride is covered with a great thick veil which is lifted only at the end of the ceremony. What an anguish for the man who has really never seen his wife . . . and what a surprise ! Thank you, I prefer our customs. That thick veil might cover any face. . . ."

"The spirit and soul alone are important for the family," gravely answered Orchid. "The body and features trouble our senses and disturb the reason. They cause all our worst misfortunes."

"That is all right, little sage," answered Monique affectionately. "But anyhow, I prefer to keep my husband for myself. I have certainly a great sympathy for you. You are charming, and I like you very much. But I cannot admit that my husband should be yours also. A Western woman will never accept such a position."

"There is nothing to be much troubled about, however," said Orchid. "I assure you that here few women suffer from the situation. On the contrary, I should not like to be the only wife of my husband."

"Thank you for the husband !" said Monique ironically.

"He is not always at home, and when there is no other wife, you are alone the whole day long. If, moreover, there are no children, the house is as silent as a tomb."

"But love?"

"Love is not everything. And if the wives

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like one another, it is happiness. Just think of the pleasure of living always with a real friend, more than a sister, with whom one shares one's joys and sorrows. To whom one may confide when in pain, and with whom one has everything in common, riches, honours, children. . . ."

"And the husband! The most important item for those who love. But you cannot understand that. You have never loved."

"Never loved?" answered Orchid sadly. "Alas! it is because I love that I am unhappy."

"You love? My husband?"

"Oh no! Excuse me again. . . ."

"And you say that to me, his wife."

"What does it matter? My life shall not be a long one."

"Is it as bad as that? Don't be afraid. You know me. I will keep your secret. But tell me . . . whom do you love?"

"Some one of your race."

"A foreigner? There is only one in the region. Mackensie?"

"Yes," said Orchid, dropping her head and again letting the tears run on her pale cheeks.

"My poor child!"

And Monique took the two hands of the girl and looked at her compassionately.

"And he loves you?"

"Yes—I am certain of it. He said so and I know it. Oh, if you could only help us to



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break this marriage ! You Westerners are such magicians."

"Help you? My own happiness is also at stake. But what can we do? I am hated by my mother-in-law, and I feel all round me a hostility which manifests itself in a thousand ways. When my husband comes back, everything will be set right, I am certain. But this Mr. Mackensie knows China very well. He might find out something. What does he say?"

"You ought to see him," suggested Orchid.

"I cannot go to his house, and he cannot come to mine. That I know would be dangerous."

"Well," pursued Orchid, blushing, "you promise me not to tell anybody what I am going to tell you? Above all, not to your husband?"

"Some more secrets?" asked Monique, smiling. "Yes, I promise."

"Mr. Mackensie was here a minute ago," said Orchid mysteriously. "He hid in my room when you entered."

"Little deceiver !" exclaimed Monique, laughing. "Ah, ah ! Chinese women are not different from their Western sisters when love leads them astray. No, don't be angry, and send quickly for your friend."

Orchid hesitated an instant, lifting towards the young woman her large imploring eyes. But the straight and loyal look she met reassured her. She went to the door of her room and called softly. Red Peony appeared.

"Tell him to come."

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"Here? With the foreign woman?" asked the little servant, astonished.

"Yes! Quickly! I have told her everything."

Red Peony went into the room, then Mackensie appeared in his turn, and bowed silently to Monique.

He was the first European she had seen since she left the last foreign settlements. She was very embarrassed at first, but, moved by an unaccountable confidence, she frankly held out her hand.

"I think that, in the circumstances, we had better speak openly and quickly. Orchid had told me everything about you. And you know everything about us. My husband will be back to-night, just in time for the ceremony, and too late to help us out of danger. He would know how to stop all that comedy if he was here. You wish to marry Orchid. I have decided to make a scandal rather than to accept the situation. My husband will approve whatever we do. But what can we do?"

"This marriage makes me desperate," answered Mackensie, "and I am perfectly decided also to do anything to stop it, even at the risk of my own life. But I think it my duty to tell you that we are in a very dangerous position, and that I cannot guarantee your life if we don't succeed. We are in a country where they do not take laughingly certain things. Just now, if somebody entered and saw us together. . . ."



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"Well?" asked she.

"It would be enough to have us both sentenced to death for adultery."

"Oh! Is it possible?"

"Yes. We must think before we act."

"Even if it is true, we must do something. We have not the time to write to the Consul. . . ."

"The Consul?" answered Mackensie. "But by your marriage you have lost your nationality. You are Chinese, and liable to Chinese laws only."

"Then what shall we do? You are not very encouraging. Let us hasten, I pray you. Find a plan. You ought to know. You have been here in China a long time."

Mackensie shrugged his shoulders desperately.

At that moment Red Peony, who had again watched, interrupted them.

"Run away! Quickly! Here are the nuptial presents coming!"

Mackensie went again towards the women's apartment. But she stopped him.

"No, not there! The presents are going to be put in that room, according to the custom, and the Little Elder Sister must receive them. If you were seen, everything would be lost."

"Then where must I go?"

"Leave at once through the front door. They will think that you came to see the master. Go! Quickly!"

The young man opened the door and crossed the threshold. But while he still held the handle of the door they heard voices outside.

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"Too late!" exclaimed Red Peony. "Let us save the Little Sister at least."

And she hastily pushed her mistress into her room. At the same time there appeared a man in official dress, holding aloft a long band of red paper. Monique recognized him as the Steward of the Palace.

"O Lord Wang!" cried he at the top of his voice. "O Great Maternal Uncle! The Auspicious Presents! The Honourable Presents! Who will receive them?"

Behind him appeared a procession of porters carrying two by two, with their long poles, innumerable boxes and furniture tied with red ropes.

Pushing them aside, Wang entered hastily.

"Here I am! I have seen the procession from afar, but my old legs could not carry me fast enough. Wait a minute. I must dress myself and go to the place of ceremony."

While he was quickly putting on his official robe and hat which he had left on a chair, he saw Monique and stopped stupefied.

"You! Is it you, O Great Nurse, who accompany the presents for the new wife of your husband? Oh, really, this is too much virtue on your part! Let me kneel in front of you."

"Not at all. . . . I did not . . ." interrupted Monique.

"Yes! yes! I must do it," pursued the old man. "To accompany the nuptial presents for the new wife of your husband! Such a nobility of soul, such high feelings have never been met



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with. I must make a report to the Governor of the city. He will quote you as an example to the whole Empire."

"But I assure you . . ." said Monique.

The old man was not to be interrupted so easily.

"And what a good omen for the future life of my daughter! I was afraid of your influence! Ah, these Westerners are really different from us, and sometimes wonderful."

Mackensie had stood irresolute near the door.

Wang saw him and greeted him:

"Ten thousand happiness! O Great Man!"

"Ten thousand congratulations and wishes!" answered Mackensie. "I came to offer you my best wishes."

"You have tired the horses of your coach and I am confused."

"I pray you, no rites between neighbours. . . . Please receive the presents. You must not keep them waiting."

"If you will allow me," said Wang.

Then turning to the steward, he put on a solemn face, while the other knelt and presented his long band of red paper.

"Here is the list of the most Honourable Presents!" said the man. "Please examine and compare."

"It is perfectly correct," answered Wang without looking, and knowing very well that a good many objects had mysteriously disappeared on the road.

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"Wait," added he, drawing a silver ingot from his sleeve. "Here is a small gift to distribute to the porters."

"Impossible to accept," answered the other, getting up. "They have been paid."

"The custom is to accept. . . ."

"How could I receive such an enormous sum?" pursued the other, taking the ingot and putting it in his sleeve.

Then turning to the porters :

"Hasten a little, you ! Bring now the robes and jewels for the new bride quickly."

The porters crossed the threshold.

"Where is the Secret Apartment that I can take there the presents?" asked the steward.

"There in front of you," said Wang.

"And you others, go and fetch the nuptial sedan-chair. O Great Man Wang," added he, "the Master has said that you would settle everything for the bridal procession and that I should have to follow your orders."

"You are occupied, I will go," said Mackensie.

"No, no ! Stay here ! Just excuse me for a minute and I will be back again."

Eight porters had brought before the door a heavy closed box covered with red silk. The panels of the sides were painted with scenes in bright colours. The roof was adorned with garlands and embroideries.

The old man turned round the sedan-chair and opened the door, examining it to see if all the ritual details had been observed.



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In the meanwhile, Red Peony, who stood at the entrance of the women's department, made a sign to Mackensie. He came towards her and leant so that she could speak in his ear.

He listened to her with an air of deep astonishment. Then he went with her to Monique and said quickly :

"This little girl has an idea. It is very risky, and if it does not succeed, it is the end for us all. But we are already very compromised. Obey her orders and let us try."

"But——" asked Monique, anxious to know what the idea was.

"Hush !" said he, going again to the door. "She will tell you. Let her lead you away."

Red Peony was tugging already at Monique's sleeve, and conducted her to the women's apartments.

Wang was coming back with the steward.

"You have understood? The flute-players must go ahead."

"Yes, O Great Man !"

"Then half of the men with red lanterns ; the musical instruments ; and the other half of the men with red lanterns."

"I have understood."

The porters, however, brought the sedan-chair into the room, which operation did not seem to be easy, judging by their efforts and exclamations :

"Oh ! oh ! Walk ahead, you skeleton !" said one.

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"Stop there, you devil!" answered the other.

"Nice man who speaks of devils in the bride's house! You smashed dog!"

"Be silent, brutes!" interrupted the steward. "The first man who speaks will die under the bamboo sticks."

"Well! well! We won't speak!" grumbled the porters.

Wang, however, pursued his recommendations to the steward.

"And be careful that the procession should pass in all the principal streets, according to the custom. In front of the Governor's palace, of the High School, and of the Temple of Literature."

"Yes, O Great Man!"

"Ah! . . . and mind the heralds. Let them proclaim clearly 'Marriage of the Wang family with the Chen family.' They must not change the names. It brings bad luck."

"I have heard."

"Don't let them go too fast. I must dress, and then you must go first as quickly as possible and inform the Lord Chen, so that everything should be ready for the witnesses before the arrival of the sedan-chair."

"Oh! We shall not be back before another two hours at the least."

The musicians of the procession had already grouped themselves on either side of the door, and were tuning their instruments. Neighbours, attracted by the news, or wishing to manifest



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their respect for Wang, as well as desirous to witness a little feast, had come in fairly great numbers and stood outside, talking and laughing. A current of joy and sympathy lightened the spirits.

"The Great Western Nurse is in the women's apartments?" asked Wang of Mackensie.

"She said she would help with the toilet of Your Precious Jewel," answered he.

"Admirable! admirable!" repeated Wang, with an accent of deep conviction.

At that moment, Red Peony showed her head through the half-opened door of the women's apartments and asked:

"Is the sedan-chair here? Are the musicians ready?"

"Yes! yes! Everything is ready," answered the steward.

"Then let them begin to blow and to scratch."

The twenty musicians who waited only for a signal, began at once the Nuptial March, that ancient and entrancing melody which nobody can hear without a feeling of pleasure. The neighbours shouted:

"Ten thousand felicities to the bride! May the Star of Happiness shine on her house! Joy and Peace! Luck and Pleasure!"

Red Peony, flushed and excited, appeared at last, holding the door of the apartment. A woman, entirely covered with an immense veil of red silk embroidered with gold and pearls, followed her and went slowly to the sedan-chair.

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Wang opened the door of red silk, and with a grave and happy face, shut it again when all the pleats of the skirt had been gathered in.

“Congratulations and myriads of wishes, my dear child !” murmured he, while the porters lifted the heavy charge to the rhythmic exclamations of :

“Oh, oh ! . . . Oh, oh ! . . . Oh, oh !”



## XIV

WHEN this same day drew to its close and the twilight set in, the Reception Hall in the Palace of a Hundred Flowers presented a wonderful aspect. On each of the small tables placed between the chairs, heavy gold or silver candlesticks were placed. The thick candles already lighted cast a brilliant light on the priceless porcelain vases beside them, and on the carved and gilded wall panellings. Great bunches of strongly-scented flowers filled the room with their perfumes. A low sculptured balustrade ran along the open side of the hall.

In the courtyard, enormous round lanterns covered with a red gauze lighted with a reflection of fire the dark foliage of the ancient cedars, and multiplied the contorted shadows of fantastic bronze animals placed in rows on either side of the central path.

The illuminations were on a scale which befitted the occasion. But they retained a discretion which doubled their charm. It suppressed the mystery of the night and gave the pleasure and security of being out of it, without suppressing the night itself. Shadows remained in the corners and, by contrast, gave to the bystanders a keener appreciation of the lighted parts, thus

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enhancing all the oppositions between the gaiety of day and the horror of night.

In the hall, the First Wife ran here and there, scolding the servants, arranging a plate laden with fruits, or a cup full of cakes. She was covered with jewels. On her head was a complicated edifice of pearls. Round her neck, several ranks of precious stones, emeralds, rubies and big pearls. Bracelets covered her wrists. Her fingers were almost hidden by magnificent rings. Her robe was decorated with the variegated embroideries provided for her rank. The pleats of her skirt were stiffened with gold flowers.

Chen, short and fat, was dressed in his official robe, and as he walked was always held by two servants. A man of his position cannot walk by himself. His round face wore an anxious and troubled expression.

"Is everything ready?" he asked of his wife.

She turned round as if she had been stung.

"That is it! Criticize! Make unpleasant remarks! You do nothing. You have no responsibility. You come when everything is finished, and you complain!"

"But, my good wife," protested he, "I don't complain. I find everything quite right. I admire everything. And really, it is admirable. It will be a beautiful feast. Everything is perfect. I only asked if the preparations were already finished."

"Don't ask anything. It will be better," answered the old lady drily.



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"It seems to me that you are a trifle nervous to-night, O First Wife. What is it?"

"Nothing at all. But you men, you are odious. I manage everything in the Palace. I am up with the dawn. And, when night has come, and the curfew has been rung, I must still go and see if everything is closed and if the watchmen are not asleep. As a reward, I reap only disagreeable comments: 'Is it ready? How? Not yet finished?' I have enough of it. You may repudiate me and send me away if you dare to do it. I won't see to anything henceforward."

"There! there!" said softly the fat man, going to her and patting her affectionately on the shoulder. "There! be calm! You have overworked yourself to-day. It will be necessary for you to rest awhile."

"To rest? Ah! ah!" sneered the First Wife. "And who will replace me? Leave me. . . . You never loved me. Have I ever forgotten my duties? Have I ever caused the public opinion to be ill-disposed to your house? And your receptions? Are not they cited as the most splendid of the province?"

"They are," affirmed Chen with conviction. "And I have always tendered the greatest homage to your virtues, your talents, your tireless activity."

"Yes! yes! You have tendered the greatest homage to my virtues by having seven secondary wives whom you changed every month!"

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"Oh ! a few little servants without beauty or intelligence."

"Ah ! if I had been as immodest as the wife of your friend Pong. . . ."

"Hush ! hush !" murmured Chen, looking round with anxiety.

"That is it, you want me to be silent, me the virtuous wife. The others, one respects them."

"Here you are, all red with anger," said Chen sadly. "There must be something wrong. What is it?"

"Nothing at all. Don't worry me."

After a short silence, however, she took her husband by the arm, waved away the servants, and told him in a low voice :

"After all, yes, there is something !"

"I was certain of it," said good Chen. "Nothing important, I trust?"

"Something very important, on the contrary, very, very important."

"You frighten me. The Viceroy wants to degrade me?"

"No. You think only of yourself. . . ."

"Then what is it? Speak !"

"You are going to be obliged to condemn to death a member of the family," said the lady lugubriously.

"Oh, well ! It is only that ! . . . A slave has broken some porcelain plates, without doubt."

"Don't banter, please. You are stupid. I



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was wrong to speak to you. I should have done as I did last time. You would have been obliged to take the matter seriously."

"Oh no! Please don't begin again that sort of thing," said Chen in a worried tone. "Last time I have been obliged to give a hundred ounces of silver to the Chief of the Police to prevent him from making a report on the matter. Thank you! Execute anybody without a judgment! We are no more in the happy days of my youth. Now it is necessary that the Chief of the Police should be present at the judgment and should approve of it, in order to enable us to behead or strangle a slave who is a thief or behaves in an impudent manner. All our liberties are taken away. But, in the meantime, will you tell me, yes or no, what it is?"

"There. Our steward accompanied to-day the procession of the nuptial presents to our new daughter-in-law. . . ."

"You will have in her a charming daughter-in-law," interrupted the old man, "and she knows the rites to perfection."

"I know! I know! If it was otherwise, I would not have chosen her."

"Well, then, the steward?"

"He has seen, in the house of Wang," answered she impressively, "the young barbarian woman your son has brought back from Europe."

"And then?" asked Chen.

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"She was alone in the parlour with the foreigner of the pagoda, you know whom I mean? The one for whom you are responsible."

"Aya ! " said Chen plaintively. " Will this d—— steward be silent? It will be necessary to give him a few ounces of silver."

"He has already told everything to the servants. The whole city is aware of the fact probably."

"Aya ! Aya ! What a bitterness ! " complained the old man. " A scandal when everything went so smoothly. Now we are obliged to have her strangled. And what will our son say? Anyhow, we shall have a hundred bamboo blows given to the steward. That will teach him to be discreet. He must have been mad to speak thus freely in a case of life and death ! What a sticking piece of mud he is ! "

"He shall have his hundred blows. An example must be made. But the other must be strangled, and strangled without delay. I knew it would come," added she sententiously. " The hare returns always to his first hiding-place, and the wild duck led astray joins always the birds of his feathers. This barbarian has compromised herself with the first foreigner she has met. It was fatal ! "

"What a bother ! What a bother ! Happily still this Mackensie is not subject to our laws, and we have no right to touch him. Fancy being obliged to strangle one for whom you are personally responsible. . . ."



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"We don't care about this young man. There will be a scandal. We must stop it and give a satisfaction to public opinion. The death of that girl will be sufficient."

"I hate those judgments!" grumbled Chen. "The accused are always crying and weeping. It moves me and prevents my thinking of higher questions. Moreover, your son is going to make the greatest difficulties. He seems to adore that girl. He has just come back from his journey, I am told. Did you speak to him about the thing?"

"Not yet. I spoke to him only of the attitude of the Viceroy."

"It is in fact much more important that this stupid adventure."

"Then you will announce to him the death of this woman, won't you?"

"I? Not at all!" protested he. "I know nothing. You will do it much better than I should. It is necessary to be very clever in such circumstances."

"That is just why you will do it as it must be done. Moreover, there is no importance in the whole thing. To-night he is going to have another wife, and an adorable one. He is not to be pitied. . . . Ah! I must tell you that I sent for the Chief of Police as soon as I heard this story. He may be here in a minute. You must settle everything before the arrival of our guests."

"You have sent for him?" asked the aston-

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ished old man. "And what if I had refused to judge that woman?"

"You have not refused," replied she calmly. "What is the use of talking about what might have happened? In such an important question it is necessary to act without any delay, so that the whole city should know the punishment at the same time as they know the crime. It is the only way of purifying the morals of the people."

"You are right," approved he. "You are right."

He was still speaking when Ming-ni appeared dressed in his official robe. He knelt to his father, who stopped him.

"Get up, my dear child. It is my duty to bow to your new dignity."

"A superior never bows first, and you will always be my superior. Mother, I have already greeted you. But where is Monique? I have looked for her everywhere. They told me she was with you in the women's apartments. I went there and did not find her. Where is she?"

Chen threw to his wife a glance of the utmost suspicion and anxiety, and said:

"It is true! Where is she?"

"Wait a minute," continued Ming-ni. "I will avail myself of her absence to speak at once with you about her. When I started, she was not on good terms with anybody here. I heard as soon as I came back that the animosity of the household against her had increased. I



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am afraid that you did not understand her, and that she did not know how to make herself loved by you."

The First Wife put on immediately such a cold face that Chen, who opened his mouth to protest, shut it again with a prudence blameable, perhaps, but wise.

"I would never dare to criticize your attitude towards her," pursued Ming-ni, saying the exact opposite of what he thought in order to make it plainer.

"I hope so," snapped the First Wife from between her pinched lips.

"However," said courageously the young man, "I had noticed several times, before my departure, that you had been a trifle unsympathetic with her. You did not show her any tenderness, any softness, as you know how to have for other women of the household."

"You would have wished me to run after her all day long?" asked ironically the old lady. "'My little darling' here; 'my sweet flower' there! When one ignores politeness and rites as she does," added she, with a hard expression, "one must not expect anything from one's mother-in-law."

"But I assure you that she is very polite, according to Western fashion."

"Nice politeness!" sneered the First Wife.

Then imitating a grotesque hand-shake and the foreign greeting.

"Goo-dee Mo-ling! And you call that a

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proper salute? No ! You may say whatever you like, when a woman does not know the rites, she it without any moral strength to conduct herself in life. But this has no real importance. It pleased you to bring back from these barbarous regions a little servant. She gave you a few days' pleasure. One does not ask anything else from her."

"Excuse me ! Excuse me !" interrupted Ming-ni.

"Yes, yes !" insisted the other, without letting him speak. "A concubine enters a house. She is sold again, or she is given to a friend. All this is without importance. The only thing which is really grave and serious is marriage, the union of two families, the First Wife ! Is it not true, O Master?" she asked her husband.

"Assuredly," approved Chen with conviction.

"But Monique *is* my First Wife !" exclaimed her son.

"She? Your First Wife? Your words are risible ! Do we know the family of this woman? Have we exchanged with them the billet of the eight ideograms? And will you tell me when the honourable witnesses lifted the nuptial veil before us? You are not married to her, and the best proof," added the incensed old lady, "is that you are going to be married to-night."

"I?" asked the stupefied young man.

"You ! Is it not true, O Master?" asked she of her husband.

"This reception is indeed for your wedding,"



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answered the old man, not without a certain embarrassment.

"Oh!" cried at last Ming-ni. "But you know very well that I am already married with Monique. . . . And first of all, where is she? . . . I understand now why she is not here," said he agitatedly. "You have locked her in a distant room. . . . Where is she? I want to know it."

"Silence!" thundered suddenly Chen, full of wrath at the independent attitude and tone of his son. "Are you going to forget the rites? You have no right to express any desire or will in my presence. I alone here have the right to will or not to will!"

"Splendid! That is speaking like the chief of a family," said the First Wife with admiration.

"I pray you, O Father," said Ming-ni, controlling himself immediately, "tell me where you have locked her?"

"I have not locked her anywhere, I assure you," answered Chen diplomatically, who had always his suspicions about the possible actions of his wife.

"However," said the old lady, "she deserves it. Moreover, it is necessary to find her, because she must appear presently and speak for herself."

"Appear? . . . and speak for herself? Before whom? And why? O Father, I pray, if you don't speak openly, I shall be unable to control myself. I shall forget the rites!"

"Unfortunate!" said Chen with authority.

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"You want me to judge you also? . . . As to Monique," added he more softly, "this is what happened: the steward who accompanied the presents for your new bride has seen Monique alone with the foreigner Mackensie."

"Well!" said Ming-ni, relieved, "you don't ignore the fact, father, that foreign customs allow such a thing. This has no importance. The only thing to do was to give a few ounces of silver to the steward in order to buy his silence."

"Yes!" answered the First Wife, with an evil satisfaction. "But he had already told it to the servants and to the whole city. . . ."

"Aya!" cried the young man, "the misfortune is on our heads. Then it is very grave indeed. I should never have started without her. How can we stop the scandal?"

"You see that we have been obliged to act," said his father. "If we did not punish her, we should be reported as favouring immorality and giving a bad example to the people. It would be the ruin of the family."

"In any case," said the young man violently, "we must make this steward die under the blows. I will go and look for Monique. We shall start to-night for Europe. I cannot live any longer in this country."

He was going to the door. His father stopped him.

"I forbid you to go out of here. I assure you again that we have not yet decided anything for her. Don't be anxious. But I order



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you to remain. The guests will come in a few minutes, and it is absolutely necessary—do you hear? absolutely necessary—that you, the bridegroom, should be here to receive them.”

“The bridegroom!” sneered Ming-ni. “I do not even know who this bride is to whom you give me, and I will not accept.”

“These barbarous countries have completely ruined you,” said the old lady sadly. “The most elementary and sacred rules of life seem to be a burden to you. Ah! how rightly they are called ‘devils,’ those d—— foreigners who come even here to trouble our sweet and calm life!”

“There! there! my good wife!” said Chen soothingly. “Let us follow the Doctrine of the Middle Course, so recommended by the Sage, and don’t go too far.”

Then turning to his son:

“In any case, I trust that you will not bring shame upon my white hair, and that you will behave as a dignitary of your rank must do. Think of your future if there was any scandal. Think of our ancestors!”

“And you affirm that Monique is not imprisoned or ill-treated?” asked Ming-ni again, turning to his mother.

“I tell you that we have not done anything,” said she doggedly.

“We will never do anything against her without warning you,” added the father. “Moreover, my dear child, let me tell you that you are

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ridiculous to make such a fuss for a woman. If I had made a similar scene every time that I had to separate from a girl ! . . . And besides, I would very much like to be in your place. Your new bird is charming. She has eyes ! ” (and he smacked his lips), “ such a mouth ! ”

“ And ears, and nose ! ” added ironically the First Wife. “ And I hope legs and arms also. . . . I am going away. Men are too stupid.”

She turned to go when a servant came in.

“ The Chief of Police is here,” said he.

“ Tell him to come,” answered the old lady. “ We will see him immediately.”

The Redoubtable Hunter of Criminals (such was his title) entered with a mixture of pride in the importance of his function, and of humility towards the powerful personages who had called him. He was dressed in a short coat of dark-blue cotton, tied at the waist with a scarf. On his breast were embroidered in red thread the words, “ Pursue and Seize.” He held in his hand a heavy bludgeon, with which he was expected to stun those who tried to resist his orders. He wore a short grey stiff moustache. A blue turban enveloped his head, hiding his ears, of which one, it must be said, had been cut off as a punishment for having exceeded his powers.

He was a respected functionary, for his duties comprised those usually given in Europe to the Attorney-General, to the examining magistrate, and to the criminal courts. The literal knowledge



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of the text of laws was required of such agents.

He made a deep curtesy to Chen, without kneeling, and said :

“ Ten thousand felicitations, O Great Man ! ”

“ Peace and happiness with you, O Chief of Justice ! ”

“ I respectfully salute the Great Nurse and the Honourable Young Lord ! ”

“ Ten thousand happiness ! ” answered they together.

“ The Great Man has sent for me,” said he, going at once to the point.

“ Yes,” said Chen negligently. “ For a little business without any great importance. . . . And you ! ” cried he violently to the servants who blocked up every entrance in order to see what was going to happen, “ go away, or I will have every one of you whipped ! . . . Yes,” pursued he when they were alone, “ for a very little business. A barbarian woman whom my son had brought from Europe has been seen by the steward of the Palace. . . . By the way, where is that dog ? ”

And he called “ Come ! ”

A servant appeared with a rapidity which suggested that he was not far away, and that his ears were strained.

“ Tell the steward to come immediately. . . . Go ! ”

The man ran out, and Chen pursued :

“ Has been seen by the steward in the house of the new bride of my son.”

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"Ah ! " said simply the Chief of the Police.

"Yes. She has been seen. She was not alone."

"Ah ! " said again the other.

"Yes. She talked with a friend of ours, one of her countrymen. You know him? The Great Man Mackensie? "

"Now that the facts have been stated," answered the prudent policeman, "I remember that a report about it had just been made to me when the messenger of the Palace entered. I knew that I should be called for," added he with a bow.

The old lady darted a significant glance to her son.

"And I perceive," continued the other, "that you call me for the family judgment, as the morals require. It is very simple. The adultery has been public. The Article 368 of the law, concerning the 'unlawful relations' provides that both accomplices must be beheaded."

"Not at all ! Not at all ! " cried Ming-ni with energy. "The adultery is not proved. The whole thing is ludicrous ! "

"Indeed, Excellency," assented the Chief of Police with a bow. "My report does not mention that the adultery has been proved."

"It is not proved? " asked indignantly the First Wife. "You know that the public rumour is a proof in such a case. It is the scandal which is punished. The facts have no importance."

"Quite my opinion, O Great Nurse," rejoined



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the Hunter of Criminals, with another bow. "We have no right to judge anybody. We simply punish the scandal in order to keep up the high standard of morality of our country. A woman about whom there is a public rumour must die. It is the only way to purify the community and to make everybody avoid even the appearance of evil doing."

"And if my wife had acted on my instructions?" asked Ming-ni, "or in view of a superior interest?"

"In such a case, Excellency, there would not be any fault."

"Why do you speak of instructions and of superior interest?" said the old lady, disdainfully shrugging her shoulders. "You were a hundred leagues away."

"All that is very good, but it has no importance whatever," concluded Chen. "The scandal alone is worthy of our attention. The city gossips already on this story. It is necessary that for the sake of moral they should learn without any delay the punishment, whether there is culpability or not."

"The Great Man looks at the question in the right light, and the highness of his views is admirable," approved the Chief of the Police.

At that moment the steward came in, very troubled and repenting bitterly for having done what he thought at the time a most cunning way of pleasing the First Wife and of reaping the profits of her consequent benevolence.

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Ming-ni rushed to him, gripped his arm, and made him walk by knocking him in the loins with his knees.

"Ah ! there you are ! Hold him ! Here is the real culprit ! Come on, dog !" said he wrathfully.

And he kicked him in the legs.

"And kneel at once before your masters, miserable calumniator ! I will have your bowels wrenched out, and your members cut into small pieces, cur ! . . . Tell us what you have seen !"

"I have seen nothing—nothing at all !" moaned the miserable man, shuddering as a leaf in a storm.

"How now? You have seen nothing !" cried furiously the old lady. "Let them bring here at once the bamboos, and let that dog be beaten slowly to death. That will teach him and the others not to lie another time."

The servants who had gathered round the group immediately widened the circle. One of them, utterly disheartened, started discreetly, went out of the Palace, and was never seen again.

"Have mercy, O Mistress ! have pity !" cried the unfortunate man, seeing himself between two dangers, and not knowing whether it was safer to lie on one point or on another, or even to say the truth.

"Then tell at once what you have seen."

"Having received from the Master," he began slowly, "the order to accompany the noble



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presents to the honourable house of the virtuous and sage bride. . . ."

"Hurry up! Hurry up!" interrupted Chen.

"Then I gave the presents to the Venerable Uncle Wang," ended he quickly.

"Do you hear him?" said triumphantly Ming-ni. "He has seen nothing. All that is a put-up story."

"Wait! wait!" said Chen importantly. "Here I command and I judge."

And walking towards the prostrated figure of the shaking steward, he set him straight with a violent blow of his knee in the face.

"Speak out at once, now!" said he sharply. "Be straightforward, and don't lose a second. If everything is not out in a minute, the Chief of Police will take you away and tear off your tongue and your nose as a punishment for your calumnies."

"Libel, in effect," said gravely the Chief of Police, "is punished by doubling the pain to which the falsely accused innocent might have been sentenced to. Article 336, on false and malignant accusations. It would be torture, with lingering death."

"I don't know anything more!" cried the poor man, frightened out of his wits. "I have forgotten everything. I prefer to die than to be beaten."

"Will you speak, yes or no?" said Chen, furiously.

"I—I did——" spluttered the steward.

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"You did what?"

"Ah—I don't remember."

"Bring here the pincers!" roared the Chief of Police to one of his men, "and tear off his nose."

"I will speak! I will speak! I remember now," said the steward hastily. "I have seen the foreign woman speaking with the barbarian who lives in the temple. They were both in the Central Hall of Lord Wang's Palace."

"And nobody was with them?" insisted the Chief of Police.

"Nobody."

"In such a case, an example is necessary."

"Indeed," said Ming-ni, white with anger. "You will do me the pleasure of taking away this dog who bites his master's hands, and you will have him exposed in a cage on the public place until he dies slowly of hunger."

"Perfectly well, Excellency," assented the Hunter of Criminals. "The slave who denounces his masters is indeed liable to be sentenced to a lingering death. Article 337 on the accusations made against one's own family."

"Pity! O Lord! have mercy! O Great Nurse!" screeched the unhappy man, "I have always been a faithful servant! Let me be beheaded or strangled . . . but not the lingering death! . . ."

"No mercy on you who had no mercy on my wife," said Ming-ni with a hard voice. "I would not give you any mercy, even if I had to



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burn the whole city in order to have you tortured ! ”

“ There ! there ! ” said the old man. “ Your anger will be satisfied. They will take him away. He shall be cut into slices if you wish it, and everything will be settled. Is it not so, Redoubtable Hunter ? ”

“ Your orders will be executed, O Great Man ! Hola ! You ! Come here ! Chain that dirt and take it away to prison. To-morrow at daylight he shall be hacked into a hundred pieces. ”

The satellites rushed on the steward as a tiger springs on its prey. In a minute they had chained him and pushed him away, kicking and knocking him, while the screams of the unfortunate man filled the tranquil air of the night.

Chen then turned to the Chief of Police.

“ It is well understood ? Whatever may be the form of my decision against that woman, and whatever may be the sequel, the law, by your presence at the judgment, has been respected. You will mention it in your report ? ”

“ I will, Excellency. Everything has been done correctly. Ten thousand congratulations ! ” added he, bowing to the three personages.

And he turned away with dignity, having received a dry bow from Ming-ni and a slight nod from the old lady.

“ And now that everything is finished, ” said Chen, with an expression of great relief, “ let us receive our guests and be merry. ”

“ My poor Monique ! ” desperately mused

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Ming-ni. "If I cannot find something to save you, you are lost!"

"My poor boy!" said the old man, patting him affectionately on the shoulders, "don't take that incident so badly. We are not responsible for our destiny. Then let us be superior to it by taking only the good and never caring about the evil. Besides," added he, "your sorrow is exaggerated. I will find you ten women prettier than your Monique, and if you wish to have barbarian women, we will have two or three sent to you. Believe me, the secret of happiness is not to give oneself to a woman or to a toy, as a slave sells his body to a master."

"You say that because you have never loved."

"Never loved?" said Chen. "I have done that all my life. . . ."

"Just so. . . . You have never loved."

"You are both ridiculous," said the First Wife. "I am going to the women's apartments in order to receive the wives and daughters of our guests. And now, my son, in honour of your marriage, and if you promise me to behave as a dignitary of your rank ought to do to-night, I promise on my part to leave Monique at liberty until to-morrow morning, and not to do anything against her without warning you."

"But if she has killed herself to-day? I cannot stand the suspense. . . . I must know where she is."

"Your duties must come before your feelings,"



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said Chen severely. "When the ceremony is over, I will help you to find again that woman. But I forbid you, in the name of our family's honour, of your brothers, of your future sons, to do anything which might ruin our reputation or endanger the position of the family."

## XV

CHEN was still explaining to his son how extremely improper it would be for him as a functionary not to be present at his own marriage, and that such a scandal would be impossible to hide or to excuse. Ming-ni listened to him sullenly, enraged to be thus obliged to allow himself to be married to another girl when his wife was lost—nowhere to be found. He considered all sorts of plans to save her, but could not find a practical one. One moment he resolved to run away with her, but then he thought of possible pursuits and imagined something else. He had also the idea of finding a woman who would consent to die in Monique's place, but abandoned it also. Men are found who, for a sum sufficient to ensure the future of their wife and children, will take the place of a criminal. The law authorizes in certain cases such substitutes. But it is not recorded that women have ever consented to perform such a disinterested part.

He was still musing, without listening to the sage counsels of his father, when old Wang, always thin and long, appeared in his official dress, coming in haste in order to be the first and to receive the guests with the father of his son-in-law.



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Ming-ni, in spite of his sorrow, was surprised to see him arriving by the back door, and so early. He said as much to his father.

"But he is not a guest to-day," answered the other.

"How? Not a guest?"

"Of course not. He is your father-in-law."

Before Ming-ni had the time to realize this, good fat Chen had gone to meet his friend.

"Don't hasten," said he. "We were not late. Our guests have not yet arrived."

And as he saw his son still hesitating, he said to him in a low and authoritative voice:

"Are you mad? What are you waiting for? Kneel at once in front of your father-in-law."

Broken since childhood to the respect of the rites, Ming-ni knelt to the old gardener.

"I knock the ground with my forehead three times three, in front of the father of my new wife."

Wang helped him at once to get up.

"No! no! We are now a family. . . . No rites."

"Well, friend," said Chen genially, "I hope that we are going to empty many cups of luke-warm wine, and that we shall compose a few immortal poems. I have already prepared some impromptu subjects."

"And I feel in my head," said the other, "all the bubbling up of poetical inspiration. Flowers, the moon, willows tenderly leaning towards each other and mixing their foliage, the

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rushes that a soft evening breeze balances and makes to sing, the birds 'Yn' and 'Yang' who die when they are separated, the phoenix and the dragon. . . . All these images whirl in my head before taking their flight in stanzas that I wish to be perfect."

"Ah, friend Wang! you are a real poet!" sighed Chen with admiration and an artless envy. "Poetry and soft wine are the greatest joys of a man under the sky."

"Intellectual intoxication is the best," corrected Wang.

A great noise interrupted them. A sedan-chair, escorted by numerous servants carrying lanterns, bustling and shouting, crossed the high portal and entered the courtyard. A "chrai-kwan" arrived, holding high a red visiting-card and screaming:

"The Great Man Ping!"

"May he deign to come," answered the "chrai-kwan" of the host.

From the sedan-chair which had been deposited near the three steps leading up to the hall, came out a man dressed in the blue silk gown of scholars.

"Ten thousand wishes of happiness!" said he, bending one knee in a curtsey, "and as many congratulations to the bridegroom's father, to the honourable father of the bride, and to the bridegroom himself."

The three hosts had gone down the steps and also dropped a curtsey.



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"Lord Wang," said the newcomer, "I am happy to be the first to announce to you the great glory which is conferred upon you."

"What glory?" asked the three men.

"The Governor of the city has had ten of your best poems posted on the walls. Already the scholars have gathered to copy the verses on their fans."

"Oh! What an undeserved honour!" exclaimed the delighted old man.

"What an honour for us all!" said Chen, taking the thing as if he was himself honoured by it.

For a moment there was a buzz of compliments. Then Ping turned to Ming-ni and asked him:

"In the Far West have they any idea of literature? Does the Government there post also on the walls the works of the great poets?"

"No. But they print and post everywhere the best speeches pronounced on political subjects in a hall reserved for such use."

"It is still literature," approved Ping. "Very inferior to poetry, certainly, but still literature. Those red-haired savages are not as uneducated as some people say. Maybe, little by little, they will be taught what civilization is by the agents our Government is sending now to them. Yours is really a most humanitarian task, O Lord Minister Plenipotentiary. To live in the midst of wild tribes in order to help them up to a higher standard of civilization; to share with them the

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results of our experience of social life ; it is indeed an admirable task."

The arrival of several guests interrupted the praises, which did not prevent Ming-ni from thinking of Monique.

But now it was a continual exchange of curtseys and greetings, each of the guests considering it as essential to use to the utmost extent such a rare occasion of displaying his knowledge of complicated rites and his perfect understanding of the situation.

The Governor of the city arrived the last of all, as befitted his dignity. All the guests put themselves into two ranks and made a deep curtsey to him as he passed, after having answered to the greetings of his hosts. He balanced his arms and shoulders elegantly at each step, smiling here, addressing a word of praise there, distributing carefully and tactfully his official politeness.

Near to the place of honour, at the farthest end of the hall, a new struggle began.

"You illuminate my thatched hovel," said Chen. "Please be seated."

"My personal reputation is enhanced by being received in your Palace," answered the Governor.

"Please sit by the young couple, O Protector of the City."

"How could I when all these lords are a hundred times more worthy of it than I am? "



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"The little ones are without any merit whatever," murmured all the flattered guests.

It was, however, necessary to sit down, the struggle having lasted long enough. The Governor dropped at last into the armchair as if overcome by the shame of himself, and spreading out his variegated robes, he put his hands on his knees and heaved a sigh of satisfaction.

"The Protector of the City has conferred a great honour on our family," said Chen, "and the posting of the poems of our honourable friend Wang on this day is a glorious mark of distinction for his talents."

"His genius is the glory of the city," gravely answered the Governor. "We must always respect those who are inspired. They see things we are blind to, and guide us on our difficult road to justice and civilization. The influence of the Lord Wang's genius inspires in its turn the highest thoughts in the people, whose minds thus are not bent only on the lowest cares and works, but soar up to the sky."

A silence followed, as if everybody had been digesting the views thus expressed. Then Chen began again :

"Are public affairs numerous and pressing?"

"Nothing really important. Public morality seems very good at the present moment. This week, however, we had to strangle a small trader. He deceived his customers as to the nature of his goods, and tried to obtain a higher price than the usual value."

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Ming-ni could not help thinking of Europe, and asking himself how many traders would be left alive if such treatment were applied to those who cheated in the same manner in the West.

"Speaking of morality," said Ping in a low voice to his neighbour, "it appears that the foreign woman brought here by the bridegroom has been surprised with the barbarian of the temple. They will probably have her discreetly strangled."

"It is to be hoped for. The conduct of that woman was inexcusable. Our wives already propose to imitate her and to go about alone and on foot, and without any veil."

"It is in such wise that morals and good customs are lost. It is harder to go upwards than to fall. A bad example destroys the steady work of years."

"What luck for the bride!" said the neighbour meaningly.

At that moment a noise, at first indistinct, but increasing as it came nearer, was heard. Suddenly, from the first courtyard, sounded the melody of the Nuptial March. The guests stood up, saying :

"The sedan-chair! The sedan-chair!"

The bridal procession appeared, mingling its own music with that of the Palace musicians, balancing its numerous red lanterns and bringing extraordinary noise and gaiety in the large court. The guests were all repeating wishes of welcome.



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“ Ten thousand times ten thousand happinesses for the new bride ! ”

“ May the Star of Luck shine on her house ! ”

“ May the perfumed breeze of Spring blow always in their apartments ! ”

“ And may the moonshine light them for ever ! ”

Suddenly a series of violent explosions shook the air. Crackers of every description were lighted without ceasing, creating such a deafening noise that those evil spirits, who come stealthily in the dark and silence, were certainly frightened and driven a thousand miles away.

The porters, shouting their orders, deposed at last the heavy red sedan-chair in front of the marble steps.

By the back door of the hall the First Wife appeared, making rapid little bows to her guests, and dropping a curtsey to the Governor. She had to be present for the great ceremony in order to attest to the validity of the marriage.

Chen stalked majestically down the steps, followed by his son, and opened the door of the sedan-chair, then he stopped, and turning toward the witnesses, he said with solemnity :

“ O Sage Scholars ! O Noble Old Men ! O You, my Elders ! O You, Powerful Governor of the City ! Be our witnesses. To-day in the hour of the Dragon, in this favourable day of the Acacias' moon, in the year of the Cock, the New Bride crosses the threshold of her new home.”

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"We are witnesses. The wedding is being concluded. May happiness reign here," said the Governor.

"May their happiness last for ever!" repeated the guests.

A form entirely covered with the long red veil of the brides, stepped out of the sedan-chair.

Ming-ni, in spite of his anxiety for his wife, had been partly reassured by the promises of his parents. Though perfectly decided to consider this ceremony as non-existent, he could not but play his part as the situation required it, and, shall we add it? was curious to see this bride who was thus imposed on him. He observed her while she lifted her foot and bent her head to get out of the chair.

According to the rites, he made as if he was going to take her in his arms to "cross the threshold," the ceremony by which a man recognizes a woman for his wife. But he simply put his arm round her waist, holding her hand over the veil. He was surprised at the strength of her hand when she answered to his grasp. But he had no time to conjecture any more on the appearance of his new wife. Chen, grave and solemn, announced already:

"In the name of my venerated ancestors, in the presence of my First Wife and of the honourable witnesses, I receive to-day the New Bride, and I authorize my son, her husband, to lead her to the prepared seats."

Slowly and gravely Ming-ni, followed by his



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parents and Wang, walked with the New Bride to the two gilded armchairs which had been placed at the farthest end of the hall. He bowed to the right and left, and they all sat down.

"And now," proclaimed Chen, "let the dancers and chorists, by the rhythmic movements and their sacred songs, drive away for ever the evil spirits. Let them call in the house the happy influences which bring luck on all our actions and give success to all our enterprises."

The courtyard, under the gnarled and twisted cedars, had been cleared. Two or three rows of enormous round red lanterns surrounded the space thus left free. Beyond the little pool, an orchestra had been set in place, composed of string instruments, two-string fiddles, great guitars, etc., of several superposed rows of sonorous stones, bronze plates, little bells, wooden cymbals, of flutes, ocarinas, long trumpets, etc.

The chief of the orchestra, dressed in a long red gown with broad sleeves, gave the signal by rubbing roughly with a wand the huge back of a sonorous wooden tiger. The orchestra began softly, all the instruments playing in unison and producing the most pleasant effect by the penetrating and grave harmonies accompanying the sound of each instrument.

Then the chief of the orchestra began to sing in a deep and grave voice, very different indeed from the discordant and high-pitched noises of the popular songs.

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' Let us celebrate that solemn union  
Which pursues the work of the Universe.  
The union of the Two Principles is renewed.  
May the happy couple, like evergreen trees,  
Live long in the love and respect of their sons and  
grandsons.'

A choir of children's voices, fresh and soft, repeated the same melody on a quicker rhythm, while sixty small dancers, dressed in long robes of a pale blue colour, with hanging sleeves, arrived, formed like a square battalion, holding aloft great peacock feathers which they slowly balanced. They separated, rejoined, crossed one another, and turned according to immemorial and noble traditions.

Then the chief of the orchestra sang alone :

" May their beloved ancestors,  
Called by our songs and our dances,  
Be informed of this union.  
Let us charm them by our choirs,  
And may their influence  
Protect us for ever from evil spirits."

This time it was a choir of deep voices which answered. Sixty men, dressed in dark orange robes, rushed in, each carrying a wide pennant with vivid colours and a shield of wood, which gave out a strange sound as they struck it rhythmically.

The child dancers and the newcomers intermingled, separated, running here and there as if they fought the evil spirits, kneeling as if they perceived the souls of the ancestors.



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The chief of orchestra sang again :

“ And you, mysterious shades  
Who appear with the night,  
And surround us until in the sky  
Light is called again by the crowing of the cock !  
Be good for the spouses !  
Take off all the stones on their road.  
May their dreams, peopled by you,  
Warn them of the future and give them happiness.”

The guests at this moment perceived that Ming-ni and his new wife were speaking in a low voice. They smiled indulgently, Chen and the First Wife exchanging a knowing nod and a relieved glance.

In the meanwhile a troop of women in violet gowns came in, holding bunches of flowers. They came graciously up to the steps of the hall and stood there offering their bouquets.

The dancers stopped suddenly. The chief of orchestra waited a moment, suspending the instruments. In the oppressive silence he began the great prayer :

“ And you above all, O powerful spirit !  
God of the Rain and the Wind !  
By whom all efforts succeed or fail !  
By whom awkward men will achieve so often,  
What the most skilful will have missed !  
God of Luck ! Almighty God !  
Always keep this couple on the top of your wheel !  
Hear my prayers. Listen to my songs ! ”

The hundred and eighty dancers prostrated

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themselves, moaning and lamenting in order to move the God of Luck, that magical, mysterious and whimsical force which rules the universe, and by which every enterprise is favoured or destroyed ; which nobody can foresee or rule ; which ruins in a day the richest, and gives suddenly a full happiness to the most miserable and unfortunate men ; which bestows success on the most foolhardy undertakings, and makes the most carefully prepared to fail. Luck at last, which makes us to be born with the greatest gifts in the palace of a king, or, on the contrary, with the worst physical and mental defects in the slums of great cities ; Luck which drives us on our destiny.

The dances and prayers terminated at length with a last slow grave melody of the orchestra, and silence reigned again in the courtyard.

Chen stood up and proclaimed :

“ The solemn instant has come. According to our immemorial custom, in order that the honourable witnesses may know by themselves the identity of the couple of whom the wedding is to-day consecrated, the bride, contrary to all ideas of modesty, will lift up her veil and uncover her face.”

Ming-ni then stood in his turn, and bowing to the assistant, said :

“ O Venerable Witnesses, my bride here present under this veil, and myself, are then indissolubly and incontestably united? ”



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"Without doubt. Strange question," answered the Governor.

"And you, O my Parents, your expressed will is that I should be for ever united to this woman here?" asked again the young man.

"Certainly it is our will," said energetically the First Wife.

"Then, O you my Parents, and you, O Witnesses, you have consecrated according to our rites my marriage with The Little Elder Sister Monique de Rosen. Our wedding has been already celebrated according to the custom of the Western lands. To-day you have made it indissoluble in our country also."

And then, lifting up the great red silk, he unveiled the charming smiling face of Monique, dressed and bejewelled in the most orthodox Chinese fashion.

For a moment, surprise was depicted on all faces.

"She! The foreign woman!" cried the First Wife, absolutely stunned. "How can that be? . . . I knew the Devils of the Ocean were sorcerers. . . ."

But Chen interrupted her sharply:

"Whatever may happen, no scandal."

Then he leant smiling to his son and said:

"Is it in the Western lands that you have learned to deceive your old parents like this?"

"The Jade Emperor who reigns in the hidden world," answered the young man simply, "has wished undoubtedly to reward me for my obedi-

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ence to your orders. He has transformed my wife."

The Governor, seeing that the chief of the family seemed to approve of the incident, stood up heavily, and said loudly :

"Admirable ! He wanted to legitimate his marriage ! What a remarkable observance of the rites !"

All the witnesses, waiting for the signal of the Governor, stood up in their turn and applauded.

Wang alone, plunged in a deep poetical inspiration, smiled happily, without having remarked anything.



## XVI

WHILE the witnesses were still standing, the Nuptial March was heard again coming from the first courtyard, and filled the Palace with its entrancing melody, while a new bridal procession appeared before the astonished witnesses. The ranks of dancers opened, and a great red sedan-chair of weddings was brought on and was deposited at the foot of the steps.

Wang, drawn from his reverie by the bustle and noise, looked about him with stupefaction, and leaning towards his nearest neighbour, asked :

“ Have I been dreaming? It seemed to me that the sedan-chair had come already, and that the wedding was finished.”

The neighbour, a little embarrassed, searched in vain in his mind for a suitable answer, but could find none. Ming-ni crossed the hall and went to the old man, leading him up to the Governor. This worthy functionary looked up at Chen and at the First Wife for an explanation of the mystery, but the old couple seemed to be as troubled as he was.

Ming-ni, bowing to the Governor, to his parents, and to the witnesses, said loudly :

“ O Honourable Elders, deign again to be the witnesses of a second wedding. My noble father

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has been made responsible for the foreign Lord Mackensie, whom we know and respect, and is thus a second father for him. . . ."

"Quite true," nodded the Governor.

"My father, acting in that capacity in the name of the Great Foreign Lord, has exchanged the billet of the eight ideograms with our illustrious poet Wang, glory of our city and pride of the Palace of a Hundred Flowers."

"But you never said a word of all that," said Wang in a low tone to Chen.

"I did not know. . . . I had not understood," muttered Chen. "But what does it matter? Mackensie's life is as dear to me as my own . . . nearly."

"But," said the old man, hesitating.

"Your daughter loves him," said Monique, who was behind them.

"And, besides, it is too late now," added Ming-ni. "There would be a scandal."

On a signal from the young man, a servant at that moment introduced Mackensie. He had his evening suit on, and the sight of this strange costume plunged the audience in a stupor akin to awe.

The young foreigner dropped a very correct curtsy to the Governor, and said :

"I bow to the Father and Mother of the People, to the guardian of the peace and prosperity of the region, to the representative of the highest authorities."

"Ten thousand wishes of happiness, and as



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many congratulations ! " answered the flattered dignitary.

And all the audience imitated him.

The question was settled, since the local authority had accepted it. Wang accordingly said to Chen :

" In fact, it is quite correct and in keeping with our customs. Everything is perfect."

Mackensie bowed to the guests.

" I salute the honourable witnesses, of whom the virtue, justice and social qualities make this city the abode of happiness and joy."

" We bow to the Venerable Foreign Lord," murmured the guests, won in their turn.

Ming-ni, however, said in a low voice to his father : " Go with him quickly, as for a son."

Chen looked at the First Wife. But what could he do? The Governor had approved of the thing. If he refused, it would cause a scandal. . . . He submitted with good grace to the occasion.

" Come, O my Son," said he, smiling to Mackensie, and both went down the steps.

The sedan-chair in the meantime had crossed the courtyard. They were in time to receive it with the same ceremonial which had been used already.

Chen made the formal announcement of the " crossing of the threshold," and led the young couple to the two gilded armchairs vacated by Ming-ni and Monique.

However, this time, in order to reassure the witnesses on the real identity of the new bride, Mackensie made at once the ceremony of the

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unveiling of the bride, revealing to the admiring looks of the assistants the flushed face of Orchid.

Monique and Orchid exchanged a relieved smile of affection. The First Wife, unable to contain herself any more, went discreetly out of the room.

On a sign from Chen, the propitiatory songs and dances began again, while the servants filled the cups of the witnesses with a perfumed luke-warm wine, and placed on the tables new plates loaded with various dainties. The personal servant of each guest stood behind his master, preparing his silver *yea-trai*, or his long thin pipe, and lighting it.

Private conversations were carried on freely, as the respect of even the most solemn prayers is not great among the rationalist disciples of Confucius.

Poets exchanged their impromptu works, the majority of which had been prepared long beforehand. They mutually praised in lyric terms their talents.

A few simple souls "played fists," each of the two partners lowering one hand suddenly at the same time, and saying together the number each believed would represent the total number of fingers open or shut in the opposing hands. Then the loser had to empty his cup of wine and show the bottom, saying :

"Kan pei" ("I have dried the cup").

From the first and second courtyards came the laughing and talking of the innumerable men who formed the escorts, and who were drinking and eating as much as they could.



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Among the witnesses reigned more and more a free, though refined, gaiety. It was really a feast of "noise and movement"—"Shoo-nao," according to the Chinese expression.

All the prayers and ceremonies were at last ended. The time had come for the two brides to enter in the secret apartments and there to pass through the ordeal of the women's examination—an ordeal which is the worst possible because the custom is to allow on that occasion all kinds of remarks, even the most disagreeable, probably as a preparation for life in common.

The tongues were sharp on Monique. The curiosity her first appearance had caused had been appeased, while the memory of her mistakes was still fresh. The visit of the Chief of Police and the judgment were known to all, the servants having spread the news. Moreover, blue eyes and fair hair are not in favour among those who call themselves proudly "li min"—"the people with black hair."

"Married to-night, to-morrow strangled!" said one. "That will teach her good manners!"

"Why has he married her if he is going to have her killed in a few hours?"

"And the other who marries a foreigner! She must be mad!"

"They say, however, that he is a great scholar. Even the tao-she and the Buddhist priests consult him on certain points of doctrine."

"In any case, he is not a Chinese functionary."

"He is nearly an adoptive son of the Lord

## IN THE CLAWS OF THE DRAGON

Chen. Besides, the venerable Wang would never have authorized the wedding if everything had not been correct."

"You may say what you like. All that would never have happened formerly. Such weddings are contrary to our sacred customs."

"Anyhow, I wish I knew how they are going to kill the barbarian."

Such remarks, and others similar, though made in a low voice, reached the ears of the two brides. Orchid knew Chinese ideas and customs, and was considerably alarmed. She made a sign to Red Peony, who had come to witness the success or failure of her stratagem, and stood faithfully behind her mistress, ready to defend her or die with her.

"Red Peony," said Orchid, in a rapid and low voice, "did you hear? They have sentenced her to death! Why? What have we done? And what shall we do now?"

"It is not for the change of brides that she is sentenced. She has been seen with your husband when the presents were brought in, and the Chief of the Police was called for the judgment. We have done what has been done very often. Read again the *Rao-Tsioo chwan*. The whole novel is the story of a bride changed for another at the last minute. Who would make a scandal and protest for such a thing?"

"Yes. But for her?"

"We have the night before us. They say that nothing shall be done until the Lord Chen and



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the First Wife give the order to-morrow. . . . And they will not be up very early after this night's work."

"Yes, but what if they have already poisoned her?"

Monique, however, began to be thoroughly frightened. She had been at first very pleased and relieved at the success of their darling scheme. But now this mysterious threat of death, this story of a judgment passed against her without her presence, recalled to her mind many pressing recommendations of her husband and his unconcealed anxiousness for her.

Moreover, these women in variegated dresses, who turned to her their painted and odd faces, and were covered with jewels and strong-smelling flowers, made her dizzy by their continuous movement and the chattering of their shrill voices.

She began to feel her strength abandon her, physically and morally. She had the impression of slipping faster and faster down a precipice, then she closed her eyes, called in a low voice "Mama!" and fainted.

Orchid and Red Peony were in time to prevent her from falling. They called servants in a sharp tone, and before anybody could have thought or done anything, Orchid bade the slaves to help her carry the insensible young woman to her pavilion, and left the whole party, after some hurried, though very correct, salutations and thanks.

## XVII

THE guests, when the Governor had started, did not sit down again. They left together, according to the custom. Ming-ni, in spite of his feelings, could not but stay with them to the last. It was his social duty. But as soon as the last witness was seated in his sedan-chair, the young man ran to the women's apartments. There he met his mother, who, with her most scornful air, told him that Monique had fainted and had been carried to her pavilion.

"She has been poisoned," said Ming-ni at once.

It is the most discreet mode of execution in such family dramas, the most human also, because, when the poison is strong enough, the victim dies immediately, before having any knowledge of her sentence.

"Not by me, if she has been," said the old lady regretfully. "I told you that I would not do anything before warning you. . . . And your poor father is not the man to have done such a thing," added she disdainfully.

"Maybe she poisoned herself," said Ming-ni. "What has she eaten here?"

"Nothing at all. And I don't think that she has honour enough to have killed herself. If



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she had had any respect of herself, she would not have waited to be sentenced. What I did and said to her would have been enough, without speaking of what all the women of the family told her. . . . If you had only heard what was going on in the women's apartments."

"We will discuss that another day," hurriedly said the young man. "Good-night, mother."

"Good-night, my poor misled child. . . ."

He ran to their pavilion. There, on the terrace, under the projecting roof, he found Mackensie, who had come straight to the pavilion and was waiting for him.

"Don't be frightened. It is nothing," said the engineer, when he saw the other. "She is much better. My wife is with her."

And he went in with him.

Monique, indeed, had recovered quickly from her faintness. She had opened her eyes and seen Orchid leaning over her and taking off gently her head ornaments and her necklaces. She heaved a great sigh and murmured :

"I am so tired."

Then she remembered the incidents of the night and her anxiety.

"Is it true that they want to kill me?" asked she.

"Don't be troubled," said Orchid tenderly.

"We have been able to arrange both our weddings, when we were going to be separated for ever from those we love. We will save you from the present danger."

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“ But what have I done? One cannot sentence a person without hearing him.”

Orchid could not prevent herself from smiling.

“ It is useless to discuss one's fate,” said she simply. “ But we must try to escape it when it does not suit us, and when such an escape is possible.”

Mackensie had arrived at that moment. Orchid told him in a few words the situation. He stayed outside to think about a way of escape, and to wait for Ming-ni. Then the two men came in together. The young diplomat rushed to the couch where his wife lay, and kneeled by it with such a movement of love that Monique felt immediately a new force. She threw her arms round his neck and cried :

“ Save me ! They want to kill me ! ”

“ Don't be afraid,” answered he tenderly. “ We will not let you die. . . . But we must not lose one minute.”

Then speaking to the others :

“ My parents have promised not to do anything before to-morrow. We have the whole night before us to act. To-morrow it would be too late. My mother will never pardon us that substitution of brides. I had even suspected her to have poisoned Monique. And for you two, you are not secure either, in spite of the guarantee of my father. If you were poisoned in reality, it would only be a matter of several ounces of gold to buy off the medical examiner, the ‘ woo-tso ’ sent by the Governor. He would



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declare that you died a natural death, and nobody would dare to gainsay him. My poor father, in spite of his personal feelings, would rather do it than stand the continuous wrath and tauntings of my mother."

"Then what do you advise?" asked Mackensie.

"We must fly away immediately. I will write to my father. He will find some means to delay the pursuers if my mother starts them. Time will pass and soften everything."

"Fly away? I had thought of it. But how? And when? We have neither porters, nor travelling chairs, nor horses. . . ."

"You forget that the men with whom I came back last night must still be in the palace. If they are not dead drunk, they will be able to start at a moment's notice. It is all a matter of payment."

Then he called his servant, and, without giving him any explanation, in order to avoid an indiscretion, told him to bring in at once the "mafoo trow" (the head of the muleteers). Then he helped the others to pack rapidly the most necessary things.

A few minutes after the muleteer appeared, tidying his blue linen blouse, tied at the waist by a scarf, and unrolling from his shaven head, as a token of respect, his long plaited hair.

Ming-ni met him on the terrace.

"Your men and horses are in the Palace?" asked he.

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"Yes, O Great Man."

"They have eaten and drunk . . . not too much?"

"No, O Great Man."

"I have just received the order to start again on an official mission. I must start at once, and travel at double stages."

"But, O Great Man," objected the muleteer, who had heard some of the stories told in the Palace, and was afraid to find himself compromised in a drama, "my men and animals are tired, and cannot start again without a rest."

"Instead of the official pay, I will give your men double the ordinary pay. And here is for you ten ounces of silver," said the young man, who had foreseen his objections.

And he drew from his sleeve a silver ingot, which he gave to the man. The other took it in his hand and weighed it in silence, and seemed to hesitate still.

"And there will be another one for you if we arrive in time at Weihsien," added Ming-ni. . . . "But if you are not ready in ten minutes, I will report you to-morrow for bad conduct during our last journey."

"I obey, O Great Man. I obey," hastily answered the man, pocketing the ingots. . . .

"But the men are very tired," added he hypocritically. "They would like also to leave something to their families here."

"Here are five ounces for them," said



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Ming-ni, who was prepared for the request.  
“But hasten. . . .”

And turning to his servant :

“We must have two sedan-chairs and two saddle horses. The foreign lord and his wife will come with us. Have everything prepared in silence on the place out of the Palace. I would rather not disturb the rest of my venerable parents.”

“I understand,” replied the servant, and he started hurriedly with the muleteer.

In the pavilion, the travelling boxes were already packed. The two young women had retired into their rooms to change their dresses and put on more suitable garments. Mackensie prepared to run to his room in the temple, but the faithful Little Badger, who had taken a silent but effective part in the events of the evening, showed him a trunk and handbag ready in the first room.

“I was not very confident in the final result of this affair, and I have packed our most precious possessions. Will the Great Man see if everything is there?”

Mackensie looked at him admiringly.

“And I called you sometimes a little fool,” said he.

“Please will the Great Man change his dress rapidly,” answered the gratified boy. “Here is a travelling suit.”

A few minutes afterwards, when the muleteers came for the luggage, everybody was ready wait-

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ing for them. The crescent of the moon lighted their way while they crossed noiselessly the gardens and the courtyards. They went out of the Palace gate. The mules and horses were grouped on the large open space, their heads down. The men, half asleep themselves, tied the boxes on the packsaddles without the usual accompaniment of swearing and screaming.

Everybody, excepting the travellers, slept now in the Palace and in the city. All the houses were shut, and the whole town seemed to have been abandoned. Now and again a dog barked furiously. The neighbouring dogs answered, then everything would be silent again. From the gardens of the Palace came the "clap-clap-clap" of a watchman beating his small wooden drum in order to show possible burglars that they would be found out, and that they had better not come.

They were ready at last. Monique and Orchid sat together in a sedan-chair, while in the other was little Red Peony, with their personal belongings. They started along the streets, where the horses' hoofs, striking the slippery stone slabs, awakened echoes in the shut and barred shops.

Ming-ni had with him the passport of a functionary on an official mission, which had been delivered to him for his last journey. He showed it to the guard at the City Gate, who, seeing it was all in order, allowed them to pass through.

They were out at last, on the way to safety and freedom.



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The city was built in a fairly large valley, surrounded with high hills. A thick mist, rising from the flooded rice fields, smothered the pale and dim light of the moon. The roads, happily, were in a good state of repair round the city, and they were able to make good progress, in spite of the obscurity.

They were already in a chaotic group of hills out of the valley when the first grey light of dawn delineated the crests of the hills and turned to a sweet green the black mass of the uncultivated slopes.

## XVIII

THEY stopped only a few minutes for breakfast when the sun rose. Then they started again. The hours passed, the distance increased. They began to believe themselves out of reach. Then, behind them, on the sinuous pathway following the turnings of the hills, they saw a horseman galloping.

Ming-ni, constantly turning his head to see if they were not pursued, was the first to perceive the distant man, and, calling the attention of Mackensie to him, said :

“ We are lost ! ”

The engineer looked.

“ He seems to be alone and without any escort,” said he. “ We will buy him off, or kill him. If we must die, better die for something worth it. But if there is an escort, we are lost indeed.”

The horseman overtook them at last. It was a servant of the Palace. He saluted respectfully Ming-ni, and said :

“ Peace and prosperity, O Great Man. The lord has entrusted me with this message for you.”

From his high boot, he drew a long envelope barred with a red paper band, and gave it to



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the young man. Ming-ni looked at it a moment, and, recognizing his father's handwriting, broke the band and pulled from the envelope a thin sheet of flowery paper covered with ideograms. He read :

To the Lord Imperial Envoy to the Foreign Countries,  
his father writes this :

In the desire not to trouble the happiness of newly wed couples, I availed myself yesterday of a moment when, all our guests having departed, I found myself alone with my First Wife. I informed her that during the feast a messenger had brought you the order from a most wise Government to start again without a minute's delay and to return to your post in Europe.

The First Wife could hardly believe me. She even wanted to ask you immediately your intentions. I had to use all my authority to prevent her. She consented to wait till the morning. What was her surprise when your pavilion was found to be empty. She was very angry that in your haste to obey the Imperial order you should have taken away with you your wife, from whom some explanations were, it appears, wanted. I had again to tell her that it would be insulting the Imperial Majesty Himself to pursue and stop on his way an Imperial Envoy.

The friend for the life of whom I am responsible had, I have been told, some work to survey at the other end of the projected road with double steel ruts. He has taken this opportunity of travelling with you, and I am sure that you will prevent him from making any useless imprudence. It seems also that his work will keep him away during two or three months.

Everything, really, in nature is admirably arranged. And your unexpected departure, though painful to our heart, will, I hope, serve only to your future happiness and success in life.

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After a certain time, all things become smooth again. The gushing stream of anger having flowed away, the solid rocks of affection will reappear.

I trust that the Star of Happiness will shine ceaselessly on your way, and that a favourable wind will carry you to your destination. I trust also that you will be promoted in rank, that you will attain a great longevity, and that you will have many sons in order to perpetuate our family and the sacrifices to our ancestors.

Ming-ni, considerably relieved and deeply grateful to his father, hastened to explain to Mackensie and to the ladies how they had been protected. Old Chen's discreet hints were understood and approved.

"Yes," said Ming-ni at last, "but my mother is not so easily managed. She may very well change her mind and send an armed troop after us, without even warning my father. Let us travel as fast as we can."

"We shall die together, in any case," said Orchid, who seemed to know no other way of escape from her difficulties.

They had not to resort to such an extremity. Whether the rapidity of their march had rendered pursuit fruitless; whether the First Wife, for once in her life, had obeyed her husband, they never knew. They had only the pleasure of having a most easy journey. The gangs of highwaymen signalled in the region had probably been disbanded by the last military operations. Anyhow, everybody on the way reported that the country was now very quiet.



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Monique and Orchid, constantly together, and bound to each other by the vivid memory of the recent events, felt their natural sympathy change rapidly into a deep affection.

Monique showed to her friend the stages of her precedent voyage. She remembered also her feelings of enthusiasm and admiration, and was surprised not to be moved again in this manner. On the contrary, the landscapes and the cities caused her now a sort of anguish she could not understand.

"Maybe it is the regret to leave them behind," suggested Orchid.

"But this is not my country," answered Monique. "How could I regret leaving it, when I was not sorry to leave France behind?"

At Krwei-chow-foo, Ming-ni and Monique had to separate from their companions. They were going to take again a house-boat down the river, while Mackensie and Orchid had to stay in the city. The work on the railway line had begun. The threatened revolts had been so vigorously repressed that muleteers and cartmen had thought it preferable to stand still and lose their trade rather than to rebel and lose their lives. Many of them had found already a profitable employment in the new work. They regretted their freedom of the past, and did not enjoy their monotonous labour. But what could they do?

The separation between the friends was painful. They had grown to trust each other in the

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danger, and such a basis for affection is not easily forgotten.

"I will study as much as I can in order to write to you myself," said Monique.

"And I will study your language in order to speak with you when you come back," answered Orchid.

The moment had come to start. They kissed each other, with tears in the eyes. Orchid and Mackensie climbed on the bank again. The "lao-ta" gave the signal to the boatmen. The last rope was let go. The boat was pushed away from the vessels moored together in the harbour. The sail was hoisted, and they began to descend the current.

Orchid and Mackensie, on the bank, were soon two little indistinct figures, and finally disappeared.

Monique was dressed in the Chinese fashion. She hid her fair hair under ornaments of flowers or jewels. Was it her sadness? Was it the influence of the six months she had passed in purely Chinese surroundings? Was it the lesson of the past events? Anyhow, she did not think of going out of her cabin. She sat reading, studying, doing some needlework. Ming-ni could hardly persuade her to go out while the boatmen had their meals and nobody was on deck.

When they arrived at Hankow, they had to leave their comfortable house-boat, and to take one of the river steamers. In order to avoid the



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rough remarks and the rude looks of the foreigners, they resolved to wear European dresses.

It was a painful experience for Monique. She could not walk any more with high heels. Her hat would not stay on her head. And many other details of her toilet appeared to her the acme of discomfort and barbarity.

Ming-ni had to go to Peking in order to pay visits to some members of the "Wai-woo-poo," the Board of Exterior Affairs.

The details of the journey did not remain in Monique's memory. She remembered only two or three days in a steamer, and then the train, rolling in an immensity of grey plains. And suddenly, in the middle of the plains, a gigantic black crenelated wall, with high strange edifices at regular intervals. Beyond, in the distance, a half-circle of blue and mauve hills.

She remembered also a number of magnificent palaces and temples, of moats and walls, of deep gates and strange archways, immensely broad avenues, groups of Tartar horsemen galloping, covered with rude furs, or, on the contrary, an escort of Chinese functionaries cantering in their gorgeous silk dresses.

The hideous buildings of the foreign legations did not impress her with any idea of artistic superiority.

They started again, this time by train, rolling day and night for a fortnight, at first through the grey autumn plains, then through the Great

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Wall, along the sea, and again through the plains of Manchuria.

Seated comfortably in the armchairs of the Russian train, they saw the great Siberian forest, the "taiga," Irkoutsk the White, then the Western Moors, the "toondras," the fir-tree-clad Ural hills, and the black earth of the Russian plains.

Moscow was already spoilt by modern constructions. Nothing remained of the admirable ancient district. The low wooden houses which lined their pink, blue, or green façades had given place to the grey, sad and ugly modern buildings, the Berlin style which invades modern cities, as a cancer gains every day and destroys human beauty.



## XIX

ON arriving in Paris, they found Madame de Rosen and a group of friends waiting for them. Ming-ni and Monique had been absent for less than ten months, not long enough to be entirely forgotten.

Mother and daughter kissed each other affectionately. The separation and the pleasure of meeting again had effaced from their minds the memory of their misunderstandings. Madame de Rosen felt even a real pleasure on seeing her son-in-law. She had always had a sort of notion that he would submit Monique to the most frightful treatments, and was surprised and happy to see her error. She even lost a little of the respect that Ming-ni had inspired in her.

Those Chinese are not so mysterious after all, thought she. He is like other people, though less lively.

As to the friends, they spoke all at the same time without waiting for an answer, according to the Parisian fashion.

"I have received your letters, you know," said one. "I showed them to everybody. You have seen astonishing things. But, of course, you exaggerated a little, did you not?"

"Is it true that you had to eat with small sticks?" asked another. "How could you

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manage it for the rice? You must show me how you did it."

"You do not regret your marvellous Garden of a Hundred Flowers? Was it really as beautiful as you described it?"

"And your father and mother-in-law?" asked discreetly another, while Ming-ni was speaking with his friends from the Embassy. "Were they very nice to you? Did they speak French very well? No? Not at all? . . . But it is true that you speak Chinese now that you have been in China. . . . Oh! just say a few words, that we may hear what it is like."

The little group came out of the station at last and entered various means of conveyances to go to Madame de Rosen's, where the most intimate friends of Monique had been asked to come, and where the travellers intended to stay for a few days.

Monique, in a carriage with her mother, felt a sort of happy calm which she had not known for a long time. It was a tremendous relief to know she was free from any attempt on her life; she had even a sensation of returning to a normal life. The sight of a policeman suggested to her dim ideas of social order, justice, humanitarian tribunals. The dirty blackness of the houses and streets struck her only with sympathetic memories. She nearly admired the mixed style of the Grand Palais and Petit-Palais on the Champs Élysées, though smiling at their Greek columns under the smoky sky, and at



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their gigantic gates, copied from mosques of the Land of the Sun and ridiculously out of place in the grey and cold atmosphere of the North. The groups of horses jumping into space from the corners of the Palace's roof, and the winged steeds on the columns of the bridge, pleased her by their meaningless absurdity. Has one ever seen horses galloping on a roof?

The movement in the streets, the hooting of the motor-cars, the women with their comical fancy-dresses dictated by fashion, absorbed all her attention. She even asked :

“ Is there a public ceremony to-day, that there are so many people in the streets? ”

The chattering and questioning of her friends made her quite dizzy, while she was surprised at the exiguity and stuffiness of the rooms, which in her memory, were on the contrary rather large.

Madame de Rosen and the visitors left the travellers alone at last.

“ After such a long voyage, you must be tired,” said they.

In fact, they were not at all tired.

On the following day Ming-ni went to the Embassy and resumed his work. The Ambassador was very pleased to see him, and waved aside the thanks that Ming-ni offered him for his protection.

“ Not at all,” said the old man. “ I had to reward your merit and your exertions. But now tell me, did you arrive in time for those funerals? ”

Ming-ni remembered happily the pretext given for his departure.

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"Alas ! no, O Great Man, I was too late. Nevertheless, the proper sacrifices have been done by me in front of the sacred tablets, and I hope that the shades of our ancestors are satisfied."

"And the family of your uncle?" insisted the Duke. "Did he leave many wives and daughters? There was no male descendant, since you had to go in order to perform the ceremonies yourself."

"No. He did not leave anybody behind, either wives or daughters," said Ming-ni, converting thus to nothingness a branch of his family invented for the need of a moment.

"How dreadful !" said the Duke piously, but not without a point of archness. "He was very young probably?"

"Yes, quite young."

The subject was at last dismissed, and life followed its ordinary course.

Monique found herself surrounded by many curious and admiring people. Her friends were glad to see her, and very interested in the numerous anecdotes that she told them about Chinese life and customs. Her gaiety, her beauty, her personal charm and a new attractiveness that she had acquired was a valuable element in her circle of acquaintances.

She was more and more appreciated, and had even a sort of celebrity. She became "the beautiful and charming Viscountess of Lin." No reception of enlightened and travelled people was



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complete without her. It was even often suggested to her that she ought to publish a book on her experiences, though she was wise enough to keep to herself her most important adventure.

Her new success gave her a renewed pleasure in social gatherings. She continued to judge everybody as inferior, but as her superiority was recognized, she made allowances for other people's faults, and found a certain unexplained satisfaction in their affability and compliments.

Madame de Rosen accompanied her. She was proud of her daughter's success, and as it was due in part to the name and position of her son-in-law, she was all tenderness and smiles for him.

Dinners, tea-parties, receptions, and long visits to dressmakers filled again, with a happy and unchanging regularity, the days of the two ladies.

A year after the Duke of Krong returned to China. He had obtained for Ming-ni to be appointed in his place. The young couple had for themselves the splendid hotel of the Rue de Babylon. It was the highest step in the ladder of social position and success for Monique.

She had nearly forgotten Orchid. The memories of her sojourn in China were brought down to the just Parisian proportion of a group of sentences such as would revive the interest of a banal meeting, or give a new life to a dying conversation.

"The Yang-tse rapids . . . the simmering water . . . the chains of men pulling at the junks. . . ."

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"The mountains, the narrow winding paths with large stone slabs . . . the strings of laden mules. . . ."

"Our house and gardens over there . . . the Palace of a Hundred Flowers. . . . My friend Orchid. . . ."

"Orchid? What a charming name! Have all women a name of a flower?"

"You ought to go to Peking for the autumn instead of going in the country. . . . It is so near now with the Trans-Siberian . . . only fourteen days. . . ."

"And you were in Chinese dress?"

"Of course. . . ."

And if her friends were in the house, they looked at the robes and jewels. They tried the pearl head-dresses. . . .

Two years elapsed in this fashion. But by insensible stages, the success of Monique diminished. She had no more the same bright pleasure in her surroundings, and, on the other hand, her provision of stories and images of China was not inexhaustible. Her Chinese costume and robes remained in the wardrobe, and her jewels did not excite the same admiration. Little by little she received fewer invitations, which was exactly in accordance with her wishes. Her circle was restricted more and more to her intimate friends and to the necessary official acquaintances of her husband. Social functions became again duties, and wearisome duties, for her.



## XX

IT was in this phase of her life that her husband was called to Peking in order to study there the preliminaries of a new treaty with France.

Ming-ni, enlightened by the memory of their last sojourn in China, and uncertain, moreover, about the conditions of his life in Peking, decided to leave Monique behind in Paris. The same motives prevented the young woman from insisting on accompanying him.

He started alone, promising, if his absence was prolonged, to prepare everything so that she could go and stay with him.

His departure left her more lonely than ever. The receptions and dinner-parties, in the absence of her husband, were interrupted. She found herself without any occupation.

During that period, she began to see her mother more and more often. Their intimacy became greater than it had ever been. They used to read the same books, to show each other their letters. They lived in a state of friendship which is only known to exist between a mother and a daughter when there is a complete mutual understanding between them.

They found themselves in the obligation, owing to Monique's position, to read all that was pub-

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lished on the Far East. Many authors dedicated their works to the widely-known Viscountess of Lin.

But they were not greatly interested by the reports of the travellers. The studies on customs, ideas and feelings were more frequently the subject of their conversations.

Madame de Rosen remained decidedly French in her judgments. The Parisian life was for her a model. Nothing different could be accepted by her.

Monique, taught by her experience, had to admit that something existed out of Paris and Parisian ideas. Perhaps also, in order to contradict her mother and keep up the conversation, she wished to defend strange customs.

In such wise, they whiled away the time, in place of better occupations.

The first letters that Ming-ni had written to his wife recounted to her his work in Peking, the congratulations of the high dignitaries, his chances of future promotions, and, above all, his unalterable love for her, his regrets at their separation, his hope of a speedy return.

On the sixth month after his departure, Monique received from the absent one a letter which troubled her and awoke in her painful memories.

My sadness at not seeing you (wrote he) is every day increasing. I feel lonely without you, and I dream unceasingly of the happiness of our next meeting.

These last days, my health has not been as good as it



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used to be. And now I am wearied of everything and anxious about the future. I reflect that the years are passing by, and that we are still without children. In spite of myself, I am constantly wondering if my ancestors and ourselves are destined to remain without offspring to perpetuate our family, and without the sacrifices with which sons and grandsons would appease our wandering shades.

I wonder if my Fate is to be the last of my name, or if, on the contrary, we shall have the happiness of being surrounded by generation upon generation of descendants bringing warmth and joy in our hearts, which will be slowly growing cold with age and weariness.

It is the sole form of immortality to which men may pretend, but it is real. Mysterious laws of nature claim it in us sooner or later. See, even in that immoral and unreasoning Europe, the despair of the childless women.

I speak openly to you, knowing fully well that we are not without hope. Your vigorous and fresh youth is still colouring everything for you in the brightest hues. But, alas! a few years, and sometimes a few days, are sufficient to change such confidence into despair, and such happy carelessness into the bitterest thoughts.

I wish that you would give me your opinion and ideas on this subject, which for all Chinese, you know, is of paramount importance.

“Here is a man full of delicacy and with strong family instincts,” declared Madame de Rosen, when her daughter showed her the preceding message. “I should not have believed that these mysterious beings could have had such ideas and could present them in such a fashion. It is truly to be regretted that you have not had children. One, or two, perhaps, no more. It enlivens a home. But, on the other hand, they hold such a place in the house that one ends

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by living only for them and by them, which brings more care than pleasure. . . . Anyhow, my poor girl, in this, as in everything else, we must be content with what we have, since we are never able to get what we desire."

"But mama, it is all very well," Monique answered plaintively, "and I wish also to have children. However, I have none, and I think I shall never have any."

"Tut, tut, tut!" said the mother. "You never know what may happen. People have children after many years' marriage as well as in the first period of their union."

"Yes, but if I have no children, my husband will be gravely disappointed, and will hold me responsible for it."

"In such matters," answered hurriedly Madame de Rosen, "one never knows who is to be blamed. . . ."

And Monique, answering her husband, tore up many sheets of paper before she could convey in a satisfactory form her feelings of regret and perfect helplessness in the situation.

Some time after another letter from Ming-ni brought her further subject for meditation.

My father has come to Peking on purpose to see me (wrote he). He has expressed several times his disappointment at not being able to see you.

He has told me that my mother has never been able to recover from the fit of anger that our wedding and hasty departure had caused her to indulge in. Her temper, already strong and violent, bursts out in terrible rages at the smallest contradiction. She also suffers



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much herself from such a lack of self-control. Her health is no more what it was.

My father, in such conditions, has passed three painful years. He has seized with alacrity, though in appearance considering it as a distasteful duty, the pretext of coming here to see me. His life in the Palace of a Hundred Flowers is, according to his own words, but sea-water and vinegar.

He has brought me news from our friends Mackensie and Orchid. They live now in our pavilion in the garden. They are greatly in favour with my mother, for they have already three children, who play and scream in all the rooms of the Palace. Mackensie has been appointed with a fairly high grade as representative of the Board of Communications. He is thus a Chinese functionary, which fact is very gratifying for our old friend Wang who, by the way, has been received a member of the Forest-of-Brushes.

My father has been most anxious and troubled to see me ailing, though my state is nothing to inspire any such thoughts. But he has spoken to me repeatedly and at some length about our still inexistent posterity, and presses me to take a decision about the fact.

Monique showed this document to her mother, and said :

“ I am most annoyed by that visit of my father-in-law. I am certain that he will win Ming-ni back to all his old Chinese prejudices.”

“ But your husband has lived in Europe long enough to know that these stories of ancestral worship are full of nonsense. It is a pity that his title and fortune should go to his brothers instead of going to your children. That is all.”

“ It is very easy to talk, but it never changed anybody's feelings and ideas. We are young, happily, and we may still hope. However, we

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have been married five years. Moreover, if we ever have a child, it might turn out to be a girl, which is for them as nothing at all for their sacrifices, since women are not supposed to have the necessary virtues for the ceremony."

"Then what can you do?" asked Madame de Rosen.

"I do not know," answered she hesitatingly. "What is to be done in such a case? See a doctor? You know what they are. They will speak and order extraordinary prescriptions without any results whatever."

After a silence she said again :

"Yes. . . . My husband seems to take the thing very seriously. My father-in-law will certainly bother him with that question. . . . And it has already been the cause of a drama. . . ."

"A drama ! What drama?" asked Madame de Rosen quickly, to whom Monique had never told the real circumstances of her departure from China.

"Yes," answered the young woman embarrassedly. "My mother-in-law wished to get rid of me because I had no children."

"Get rid of you? But you never said anything about it. And how did she intend to get rid of you?"

"Divorce, I suppose . . . or worse," added Monique, with indifference.

"She must be a dangerous lunatic, this old witch !" said the indignant mother wrathfully.

"She had to watch over the interests of her



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family," replied calmly the young woman. "Over there, it is necessary to have children, and one is entitled to repudiate any wife who does not fulfil this condition. She was consistent with the customs of her country."

"A fine country! I am glad that you are back here."

The following week the post brought to Monique new causes for alarm. Ming-ni, after having described his daily occupations, added :

My father has again spoken to me about our future. He has received a message from my mother. According to the messenger she is dangerously ill, and in her letter she mentions her state of health and entertains no illusions on the subject. She writes that she would die happy if she saw me with a son. . . . She insists ever on the absolute necessity for me, in the presence of our seeming present hopelessness on this point, to repudiate you and marry again, or take a second wife.

I told my father that, of course, it was impossible to consider the eventuality of a divorce. You know me well enough to rest assured that I love you and that my feelings will never change. You are my First Wife, in China as well as in Europe, the basis of my family, and also the friend of my life.

You and I are one. You must have the same views as mine on the future of our blood, and on the perpetuation of our family.

I pray you in consequence most earnestly to think about the question, and to give me your advice as to our next action, so that this question of descent may be settled definitely.

You know me, you know our customs and the different means of achieving this end. I leave to you entirely the choice of what is to be done, insisting only on the fact that something must be done, and without any delay.

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Monique was with her mother when she received that letter. She passed it silently on to the old lady, and remained a long time staring abstractedly in front of her. Then she slowly covered her face with her two hands and wept silently.

Her mother, who had rapidly read the message, threw it vindictively into the middle of the room, and exclaimed :

“ What does he want? What can you do? ”

“ Oh, mama ! ” sobbed the other. “ You don’t understand. My life is finished ! ”

“ Your life finished? ” asked the old lady.

“ He is not going to kill you, I imagine? ”

“ No, but I know what he means.”

“ Well, if you do, I don’t,” grumbled her mother. “ And what does this precious fool want, to make you cry in such a miserable manner? ”

“ He must have a child, and he gives me the choice between the different means of getting one.”

“ The different means? ” asked the astonished old lady. “ But I do not see very well. . . . ”

“ In a word,” said Monique nervously, “ since we have no children, and he must have one, his sole choice is between divorcing me, or taking a second wife, or adopting a child of his brothers. These are the only alternatives which his customs give him.”

“ Let him adopt the son of one of his brothers,” said the lady. “ I do not see anything so terrible in that.”

“ Yes, but his brothers have not had any sons as yet ; they have only daughters.”



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"Oh, it is different. Then the choice is between divorce and . . . ?"

"And a second wife."

"And you must choose yourself, and say which one you prefer—poison or dagger?"

"He loves me, and I love him. He could have divorced me a long time ago if he had wished it, since the consent of the wife is not even required for that. No, he wants to keep me, and he wants me to suggest on my own accord that he should take a second wife."

"Well, well!" groaned the lady, "I do not know what to admire most, his delicacy in leaving to you to suggest the only possible course, or his impudence in asking your own orders for treating you in such a shameful way. I would send him away, if I were you."

"But I love him, mama. Do you understand?" cried the poor girl. "Oh, what can I invent? What must I do?"

Madame de Rosen walked across the room in an agitated manner, then she stopped in front of her daughter.

"A second wife! A second wife!" grumbled she. "This is a very nice and gallant name for something perfectly disgraceful! They have also second wives in Europe, but they give such women their proper name."

"But you know very well that it is not the same thing," answered Monique. "There is no deceit, no secrecy, no lies. Everything is done

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openly, and with the full consent of the First Wife."

"If she is mad enough to allow such a thing, she deserves what she has."

"You forget the children, mother."

"The children! the children! Here, in France, which is a civilized country, when one has no child, one goes without. You have no children. Is it such a disaster? You are still young, and you can wait. Don't let your husband lead you astray with those stories. He wants to satisfy a little personal fancy, and tries to arrange the things to suit himself, that is all. If you allow him to have a second wife, he will take a third, a fourth . . . perhaps a hundredth. . . . You will soon have a whole harem in your house, and you will be obliged to go."

There was a silence. Then the old lady pursued with a sneer :

"Just think of what people may say here when they speak of you. They will ask, 'The Viscountess of Lin,' which one? Number one? Number two? Number fifty? No, believe me, I know men. They always find a good reason to cover their little fantasies . . . and even with your dear father. . . . Well, it was only after his death that I was quite sure of him."

"But, mama, you forget that Ming-ni has a perfect legal right to do what he likes. He may take as many wives as he chooses, and I have nothing to say."

"Well," grumbled the other, "you know



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that I have always been against this marriage with a foreigner. If you had listened to me, you would not be in such a position now."

"If I had married a Westerner, maybe I should learn now that my husband had always been on the most intimate terms with my best friend, and that the whole city knew of it, and laughed at me."

"Well, well! It does happen sometimes, it is true. But then you divorce."

"Shall I divorce now? I do not want to."

A few days after she received from Ming-ni a letter still more pressing and detailed.

I have long and earnestly thought about our situation, I love you, and I cannot bear the idea of being separated from you. Thus the question of a divorce cannot be entertained even for one minute.

My brothers having no sons, I cannot adopt one of them. We have no relations near enough to ask them to give us one of their sons. And I cannot admit that our ancestors should be worshipped by somebody who has not a drop of their blood in his veins. Personally, I would rather not have in my house a child who would not be my son or a near relative. Moreover, I could only buy such a child from poor and uneducated people, and I should be ashamed to think that his hereditary lack of gift might lead our family to ruin and destruction. Children of a good stock are not always perfect, and the son of a very ordinary man may become a genius. But, as a rule, the laws of heredity are not transgressed, especially in our country, where for several thousand years the greatest attention has been paid to such matters, and where such things are not as mixed up as in Europe.

The sole remaining means of action for us is that you should allow me to take a second wife.

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I know very well that I promised you never to do it without your express consent. And that is the reason why I now insist upon the fact that I will never do it if you do not give freely your approbation.

If you were to consent, it is well understood that, as is the custom, the child of this second wife would be your own child, and not hers. If you desired it, we might even send her away as soon as she had given you a son. She would be your servant, nothing more, until she went, and our love and happiness would not be touched or interfered with.

Your last letter does not answer this grave question. My father presses me every day. My mother is waiting anxiously for my decision. The worry may hasten her end, while her happiness on having a grandchild may prolong her life.

Monique, more tortured than ever, read this passage to her mother. The old lady took the letter, looked at it again, and said :

"What is this story of a servant who is not a mistress, of a child who would be yours without being from you, of a second wife whom he will send away as soon as she has given birth to a son? What does that mean in plain French?"

"It is very simple, mama. The poor girl will be bought for a certain time, and as soon as we do not need her any more, we may sell her again and keep the child."

"But it is slavery!"

"Not at all. Here you may hire a servant for a month by contract. Over there you hire a wife for a month or a year."

"And the child?"

"The State here takes your sons and sends



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them to the army, and even kills them, without giving a penny for it. Do you call it slavery? Over there the mother is paid for the child who is taken away from her. It is a free bargain."

"Anyhow," concluded the old lady, "believe me, and never give your consent to such a transaction. You are happy as you are. Make an effort to keep your happiness."

The poor young woman passed the day and night in the most troubled state of mind. On the morrow she answered her husband in the following manner :

Your last letters have placed me in the most painful position. You married me in my country, according to our customs and our laws. I never imagined that a day would come when you would ask me to renounce on my own accord our conventions and ideas.

Under the pretext that I have not had children from you, it never came into my thoughts to ask you the authorization of taking a "second husband," or rather, to reproduce your own expressions, to engage a "little servant" for that work and send him away after.

The mere idea of such conduct, or rather misconduct, on my part makes me blush with shame. How is it that your feelings are not exactly the same?

I have no children, it is true. But is it so certain that I am the unfortunate cause of this? I say the "unfortunate" because I begin to suffer from the solitude and sadness of my house. I remember now what Orchid used to tell me about the home without husband or child. . . . Are you going to abandon me after five years of marriage? Do you forget our past happiness? Are you going to thwart any hope for the future? We are still young. Let us wait before taking such a decision.

## XXI

FOR several weeks the post brought no letter from Ming-ni.

"It is a coincidence," said Madame de Rosen soothingly. "He has had too much work, or perhaps he has been sent on a mission."

"He is gravely ill . . . or perhaps dead," answered her daughter.

"The Chinese Foreign Office would have informed the Chargé d'Affaires of the fact," said the old lady, shrugging her shoulders.

"Then why does he not write? He has repudiated me. According to the Chinese laws, he may send me away without even informing me of his decision."

"My good girl, you are married according to the French laws, and he cannot send you away in such a cavalier fashion. We have judges."

"I should be married in France, but not in China, since, by my marriage, I have ceased to be French, and have become a Chinese."

"You are no more Chinese than I am. It is not because a pack of fools have voted a law on a question about which they did not know anything, that the plain facts of nature will be changed. The family of your father was French as well as mine. You have been brought up



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in France. You are French, and no stupid law of nationality may cancel that, and make you this or that."

"But, mama, the laws are the laws."

"Not when they are against truth and the liberty of our persons and propriety. Then we must refuse to obey them . . . or we are despicable cowards and welcome slaves of the State. I tell you that a child has the nationality of his mother, who gives him the best of her blood, and first impresses on his tender soul the basis of her education, ideas and language. The mother is certainly the mother, and no mistake is possible about it. While the husband? It is a moral certainty, and nothing else. A man can never be materially certain to be the father of a child. The father is nothing but a butterfly who passes by. Anyhow, you are French, and French you will remain."

"French or not, I have no news of him. I dare not telegraph to Peking for fear of making a scandal. I love him, and I have never met and will never meet again such an affectionate, tender and calm being."

"It is a fact that he is a true gentleman . . . not like our young men who are only taught to bully their inferiors and to show to their superiors an expression of the most abject smiling servility."

"You might perhaps write to your Chinese friend Orchid," added Madame de Rosen, after a silence.

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"Yes, but when shall I get an answer? In two months. I cannot stand such a suspense. . . . I should prefer accepting his second wife rather than losing him."

The days passed. More and more anxious, and not daring to do anything, she waited in a growing fever of impatience.

After two weeks she received at last a long letter from her husband.

Pardon me, O First Wife, to have left you so long without any news.

On the day when I posted my last letter we received, my father and I, a telegram announcing that my mother had again a grave crisis, and that she demanded to see us before her death. We had not a minute to lose. We went at once to the Board for our passports and our orders for horses at the stations of Imperial Posts on the road. One hour after we were on our way.

We did not stop on the route, starting before daylight and galloping late into the night. After twelve days we arrived at last at the Palace of a Hundred Flowers.

My mother was still alive, but she seemed to be past any hope. The doctors said that she was tormented by a fixed idea which rendered all the medicines of no effect.

We found her on her bed, propped up by cushions. In spite of the semi-darkness of the room, and in spite of her weakness, she recognized us at once. Without giving us time for any greeting, she said immediately, pointing to me:

"Has he consented?"

"Yes, he consents," answered my father.

"Ah!" said she, reclining. "I shall die happy, in the certitude now that my shade will not be without offerings. You are a good son," added she, "and I am most delighted to see you again."



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I understood then that my father had been sent to Peking on purpose to obtain from me an assent which depends on you alone, and which I have accordingly asked of you.

Could I tell my dying mother that I was waiting for your answer? Was it possible, in her state of health, to destroy the profound and evident satisfaction that my father's words had caused her?

Even in Europe, where no respect subsists save for money, the last moments of a moribund are sacred, and the promises made to them are even sometimes kept. You can hardly blame me for not having dissuaded my mother, and, in spite of my love for you, if I had to do it again, my first duty would be to act as I have done.

But our trial was not ended. When the first emotion of our sudden appearance was calmed, my mother said to me:

"Your conduct towards Monique proves to me that you are still as infatuated with her as ever. I have not tried any more accordingly to have her repudiated. I have even thought that a real second wife would not be acceptable to you or to her, with her narrow and barbarous views on the subject. I have simply bought you a little girl whom you can keep or sell, at your own choice. She is very healthy and capable of giving you lusty and well-formed children. Her father was a scholar, and might have risen to a certain rank, if he had not been killed with all his family during a raid of robbers and highwaymen; the girl alone escaped, being at that time here in the Palace on a visit to a relation. She has consented for a certain sum to give over her body to you for whatever use you deem her fit. She is waiting for you in your room."

Here again, O dear wife, what could I do? Was it possible to delay things until your answer should have come? To refuse to comply with the wish of my dying mother? Or even to lie? But I could not lie to my dying mother, especially when I knew that the girl would be submitted to a severe cross-questioning.

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Such are the real and complete circumstances of the case. I can only express again to you, O my darling, my faithful, sincere and entire love. You are my First Wife, and nothing can be changed in my feelings towards you by the presence of a little slave in the house. I love you, I love only you, and I shall always love you.

Monique remained quite dazed, the letter still in her hands, hardly able to know what to think and what to do.

She felt that her husband loved her, and, however, here was his own open and ingenuous avowal of an act which, in Europe, might be taken as a certain proof of his indifference.

She loved him, and felt a bitter pang of jealousy at the thought of his action. On the other hand, this frank and simple narration, when it would have been so easy for him to keep it in the dark, spoke strongly in his favour, and changed the whole face of the question.

Anyhow, what was she going to do? It was no more a case of deciding whether she would or would not accept the second wife. Events had delivered her of this effort. Another problem, still more difficult, was before her. Was she going to accept the situation, to approve of it even? Or, on the contrary, to take immediate steps for a divorce?

But since she was no more French, the tribunals could not apply to her the French laws, and would have to take into account the Chinese legislation on marriage, and then, while she was



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certain of a scandal, she might very well see her request refused. What would her life be then, still married to a husband who would never pardon her?

She was plunged in the deepest reflections on the subject when her mother came in.

"I have not seen you this afternoon," she remarked. "What is it? Something happened? No bad news I hope."

Monique passed her the letter silently. The old lady perused it with evident signs of mingled anger, astonishment and trouble. The matter was so serious that she asked simply :

"What are you going to do?"

"What must I do?" retorted Monique despondently.

"Well," said the old lady, "I have never heard of such a case. I have had a certain experience of life and society, but this passes my imagination."

"There was no need for him to tell me all that."

"It is a fact that any gossip from the farthest corner of China could hardly reach you here, and it is certainly in favour of his frankness, though perhaps not of his cleverness, if you ask my opinion."

"Would you have preferred that he should have lied and done the same thing secretly, as is the custom here?"

"Well," answered the old lady embarrassedly, "you might have shut your eyes, as so many

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people do, and nothing would have been changed in appearance."

"In appearance? But he loves me, and I love him. And somehow, though I have written to him to the contrary, I understand him, and I cannot see his case as I would my own if I suddenly bought a little manservant in order to have a child by him."

"Oh, shocking!" interrupted the old lady indignantly. "How can you? It is contrary to common sense to compare the two things."

"Common sense!" said Monique contemptuously. "If everybody acted through common sense, logic and justice, nothing would exist. One thing seems quite natural for men and absurd for women, and the contrary. If men displayed in their dresses the same stupidity and fickleness as we do, we should be ashamed of them, and they are not ashamed of us. If we had anything to do with politics, do you think that we should agree to appoint for four years, and without any responsibility and possible check, men who are masters of our lives and fortunes? Have you ever seen a woman arranging to leave her house to her cook for four years, without any possibility of control and with a formal understanding to let her go unpunished and free, even if she has burned the whole thing down, or sold it, or destroyed and changed everything? No, it is not common sense, but customs and conventions which rule the world."



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"Anyhow, customs and conventions do not sanction what your husband has done."

"Not here. But in the East they do. My husband wants children."

"Children!" grumbled the old lady. "Fecundity has not been fashionable in society for a long time."

"Without children the human race would disappear."

"There will always be a sufficient number of drunkards and lunatics to keep up the thing. And, moreover, if in every country they did not have so many children, the world would be much more agreeable to live in. There would be no soldiers; hence, there would be no wars. There would be no workmen, and we should thus get rid of these factories which poison the atmosphere. One would live normally as they did in the eighteenth century, when Europe contained fifty million inhabitants instead of five hundred millions."

"But, mama, the grief of seeing me without an heir must not lead you astray. We must conform to customs and act for the best. What must I do?"

But when her mother left her, at the end of the afternoon, nothing was decided upon. Her feelings carried her hither and thither, and she always found the most excellent reasons to defend her last decision.

She went to bed at last utterly exhausted and despairing of everything. Sleep carried her

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away, still thinking, suffering, and unable to see her own way. And thus it happened that a dream came to her. She was again in the Palace of a Hundred Flowers, in the Great Reception Hall on a bright and warm summer day. Beside her sat Ming-ni, but she hardly recognized him with his white hair and his wrinkled face. And she saw her own hands all shrivelled up by old age. They were both in the large gilded armchairs used at her wedding, and she understood that they celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of their union. There was a banquet.

Round the long table were a large number of people, old and young. She knew a few of them, such as Orchid and Mackensie, and her brothers-in-law and their wives. Others she had never seen. On her right especially was a splendid man, in all the strength of his fortieth year. He had dark eyes and dark hair, and he resembled strikingly somebody she had known. She strained her memory, and suddenly she saw her own face in the face of the man. He was her son. Farther on, were four young men, and with them a little girl with fair hair and blue eyes, who smiled at her. And there was a mighty array of functionaries in uniform, of friends and neighbours. And her husband stood up and said in a proud voice :

"In this, the fiftieth anniversary of our marriage, I want to ask all our friends, the witnesses of our already long lives, to drink a cup of wine in honour of my First Wife. She has



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given the whole city an example of all the virtues which lead to happiness for the family, to success and honour for the children, and which promote the morals and civilization of a country."

The Governor of the city, who was present, had risen in his turn amidst the applauses of the audience, and said :

"It is my greatest pleasure to inform you all that, with the assent of His Imperial Majesty (may he live ten thousand times ten thousand years !), the Board of Rites has decided, on my report, to confer to-day on the Highly Virtuous First Wife an undying token of honour."

And, on a sign, the servants brought in, with reverential care, a long slab of marble, on which were deeply engraved in golden letters the four ideograms, "Perfect Correction ; Unceasing Family Feelings," with her name and the date in small letters in a corner.

## XXII

WHEN Monique awoke the sun was already high. With her breakfast, the servants brought her a letter from Orchid.

They had never completely ceased their friendly correspondence, though long periods of silence had interrupted them.

We have lately had long and earnest conversations with my husband about you, your past life and your future. We have heard of the situation in which you and your husband have found yourselves. And as we love you and know your heart, we understand all your thoughts.

We have read your last letter, and I think it my duty to speak to you unreservedly on the subject. We have had together experiences which allow me now to interfere in such a delicate affair.

I would not like to imitate those friends who, when they are asked for advice, avail themselves of the opportunity and take a secret pleasure in pointing out all the wrong actions which one may have committed, and all the faults one is afflicted with.

However, it is necessary to search for the source of our evils in order to wipe them out. Now it seems to me that all your uncertainties, all your sufferings, as well as the difficulties of your husband's situation, are due to your not having resolutely abandoned your Western ideas. You have freely chosen to found a family, but you do not give yourself entirely to the task, and you allow your prejudices to stop you in your enterprise.

I know the difficulties of such a course of action, if I



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judge by the mutual misunderstanding which too often prevails on this subject between my husband and myself.

It seems that the yellow and white races are not on the same degree in the scale of nature and the ten thousand objects. The cause is probably that, for more than two thousand years we have been incessantly modelled and remodelled by the doctrine of Krong-foo-tse. His "Great Study," *Ta-sio*, the source of all sageness, teaches us that our worst enemies are our passions and instinctive impulses. The sole means to attain a proper balance and to be happy is to achieve a complete mastery over ourselves. We must not act according to our desires or wishes, but only in order to further the enterprises that we have freely undertaken to achieve. "If one wishes to maintain harmony in the State, one must first learn to maintain harmony in the family. And to maintain harmony in the family one must know how to maintain harmony in oneself." And he adds: "What I call maintain harmony is to act always according to Reason, Justice and Social Feelings, and never to listen to one's passions and appetites."

If I understand rightly what my husband says, the Westerners leave completely in the dark this primordial basis of all education. They teach children every possible subject of learning, but they never teach them how to behave towards their own passions and the wild impulses which we are subject to, and which may ruin our existence as well as that of everybody round us. They act like a madman who would place in the hand of a child a loaded pistol, and would not tell him that a bullet is sufficient to kill a man.

But, to return to yourself, I know from your father and mother-in-law the deep love entertained by your husband for you, and I know that you love him. You have freely chosen to marry him, and you have the essential basis of a happy and lasting union. Do not let your unreasoned impulses darken the clearness of your mind. Keep the essential and durable, renounce resolutely all that is secondary and passing. Help your husband in his filial duties.

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He never asked you to do it for himself. Besides, it is not a dishonourable or degrading action. It is not even a question of accepting an insult without opposing to it a fitting retribution. You know very well that his love for you will not be endangered by your consent, but, on the contrary, will be doubled by his gratefulness and his respect for your reason and indulgence.

Monique, whose ideas had already been changed by her dream of the night, felt at last a great and high vision of life fill her mind. Her troubled heart was as clear and calm as a lake under the morning sun when the hurricane is finished.

She wrote at once the following cablegram to Ming-ni :

You have acted as a good son and a faithful husband. Bring back with you the mother of our child.

And she ordered a servant to send it immediately to the telegraph office.

When her mother came in the afternoon she told her what she had done, without speaking, however, of her dream or of Orchid's letter.

Madame de Rosen lifted up her arms in despair.

"You are mad, my poor girl ! " said she at last. "You have favoured your husband's misconduct, and this is as immoral as it is imprudent."

"You will never understand, mama," replied the young woman calmly. "I have thought about it, and I am certain I have acted for the best."



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"You will repent of it very soon," said her mother, nodding sagely the head. "It is not without reason that such conduct is so strongly condemned by society."

"Maybe I shall not succeed," answered Monique. "Events do not always crown with success the best planned and best prepared actions. But it was my duty, and whatever the consequence may be, I will bear them with a satisfied conscience."

"Then I shall not say another word. You know that in any case you will always find me ready to help you out of your future difficulties."

Four weeks after the young woman received the following letter from her husband. It was addressed in an unusual manner.

To the First Wife, to the Mother of the Family, to the Mistress of the Palace of a Hundred Flowers.

I have received your "lightning letter," and I have shown it to my mother. She simply said:

"I can at last die. My duty is fulfilled. I have given many sons and daughters to my husband, but none would have been able to replace me. Now the wife chosen by my first son has shown herself such as a true mother of a family must be. I know her, and the difficulty of obtaining her consent assures me that she has the strength of character needed for her rôle, while it shows that she has mastered herself in what was for her the most painful case. Thus she will know how to teach the true principles to the children she may have either herself or by her slaves. And if my shade has some influence in the Land Under the Nine Springs, I shall have no respite until, by my exertions

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and those of our ancestors, I have obtained from the Master of the Book of Destinies the gift of a son for her."

And then, having asked if everybody was present, she added :

" Let her succeed to me as Mistress of the Palace, and let everybody obey her as they have always obeyed me."

These words have filled me with a pleasure and a pride which cannot be described. But I can tell you that, whatever happens, I shall never forget that day, and that by your action you have gained my undying devotion and respect. Henceforward you are more than my wife. You are the mother of our descendants. But I must continue.

My father, my brothers and all the members of our family answered to my mother :

" You shall be obeyed. She will be the First Wife, and we will be for her what we have always been for you."

It seemed that my mother was waiting only for your telegram. She closed her eyes, and a little later she had started on the Mysterious Way.

We have now finished the " Great " and the " Small Toilet." The coffin is closed. The priests of various religions have come in order to exorcise the evil spirits. In our ignorance of the laws which govern Life, it cannot be bad to use all the means possible to bring luck. Chance rules all our lives ; even Reason and Justice are sometimes insufficient to insure our success. If those traditional practices do not make us any good, they cannot harm anybody.

The solemn funeral will be celebrated later on, perhaps in two or three years, when an especially favourable day will be found. It is necessary, besides, that you should be present. Pending that, the coffin will be deposited in the Ancestors' Temple, and sacrifices will be offered regularly.

No duty now detaining me here, I shall follow that message and start in a few days. My official work in China is suspended by my mourning, as you know ; it is only my residence in a foreign country which may prevent me from



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resigning all my employments and honours during my three years' mourning, as the Sage laws of our country have decided for those who have lost their father or their mother.

Since you authorize it, I shall bring with me the mother of your children.

This letter filled Monique's soul with feelings of various sorts. She was above all very happy that her consent should have given such pleasure to her husband. She was also very proud to have been appointed as "Mistress of the Palace" by her mother-in-law, the same who had tried every possible means to murder her.

But she was at the same time troubled by a dim and distinct sensation of anxiousness. It seemed to her that she was on the point of starting for a great expedition, leaving for the unknown all that had formed her life. She had abandoned, as a fact, the last prejudices of her race, and the most innate conception of the Westerners, that of the single wife.

It is useless to say that Madame de Rosen, in spite of her efforts, could not restrain her anger. She burst out at last in threats :

"How dare he to bring his mistress here ! I will warn the police ! They shall throw that woman out of the place, and you will obtain a divorce ! That is what any woman with common sense would do in your place."

"If I had never loved my husband," answered her daughter composedly, "maybe I should seize upon the occasion. But I have freely chosen him. I have willingly consented to follow

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the customs of his nation. I should despise myself if I did not keep my promises."

"You will make yourself the laughing-stock of Paris. I wonder what people will say when they hear of it."

"As long as I do not make any complaint, nobody has a right to utter a single word."



## XXIII

Two weeks later, Monique received a telegram. Her husband had arrived at Marseilles, and would be in Paris in the afternoon.

She went to the station with her mother, and earnestly asked her not to say anything about the question.

"You may very well ignore it," said she. "It is such a private matter."

"But what are you going to say to her?" asked the old lady peevishly. "You are not going to greet her as a sister, I suppose?"

"Oh, mother, don't!" said Monique impatiently, who, in spite of herself, felt a curious twinge of the heart. "I will try to be always just and good. Don't excite me against her, I pray you."

They were walking up and down the platform. The train appeared at last. Amidst all the bustle and agitation of the coming passengers, it was difficult at first for them to find him, especially as, with the characteristic patience of the East, he had not mingled with the rushing crowd, but was calmly standing at the window, waiting for the porters to take his luggage away.

He was dressed in a black European suit, as he did not wish to attract public attention by

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the white gown and white head-band of Chinese mourning.

He greeted his wife with a tenderness which moved her deeply, but with a new expression of respect he had never had for her.

"And—she? Where is she?" asked Monique at last.

"Here, in the compartment. She wears already the visible signs of your motherhood."

And going to the door of the wagon he called sharply :

"Nelumbo, come here and 'kowtow' to the First Wife !"

A very young girl appeared, clad in a long pale pink tight jacket and a mauve skirt with a thousand pleats. Her large dark eyes, slow and shy, were without great expression. Her red lips alone animated her round, white face, surrounded by her intensely black hair adorned with flowers.

She descended, placing with precaution on the dirty footboard her dainty diminutive feet tied in small embroidered shoes—her "golden lotus" as they are usually called.

She was going to kneel on the platform, saying in a soft, musical voice :

"I knock the ground with my forehead in front of the First Wife, the Mistress of the Palace, the mother of my child."

But Monique hastened to stop her, especially as some travellers had turned round to look at the scene.



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"Be welcome in my house," said she. "What is your age?"

"Twice eight," answered the other, who did not wish to say the number straightforward, trying thus to deceive the evil spirits, many of which, as is well known, do not understand the first principles of arithmetic.

"You have not suffered too much on the way?"

"Everything has been very well, owing to the good influence of the First Wife."

Here Madame de Rosen could not contain her impatience.

"You do not introduce her to me?" said she, after she had exchanged some constrained greetings with her son-in-law, and looked with curiosity at the girl.

"One does not introduce a slave," coldly answered Ming-ni.

The old lady was about to make a cutting reply, but she saw the supplicating look of her daughter and stopped.

They went out of the station. In the motor-car which was waiting for them, they did not speak much. The girl was gazing with indifference out of the window. Ming-ni smiled at his wife. Madame de Rosen was wondering at her own strange position, and kept asking herself why she submitted to such an outrage. Monique looked at the girl, admiring her beautiful eyes and graceful body, envying also her state. Unconsciously she closely regarded the attitude of

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her husband towards the other, watching for a gesture which would reveal the true state of their relations, of which she had already, however, the proof.

When they arrived at the Embassy and the servants had taken their baggage upstairs, she asked her husband :

“ Where are we going to put her? ”

“ Nothing has been prepared? ” asked Ming-ni. “ Any room will do.”

“ You know very well that with the present staff all the available place has been taken by new secretaries. We are reduced to our own suite of rooms.”

“ Oh yes, it is true. Those houses are so small,” said Ming-ni. “ But never mind, anything will do. On the landing-stage before our room there used to be a “krang.”

“ Yes. It is always there. But we cannot leave this girl there.”

“ Never mind,” said he. “ As long as she has a roof and a bed, she will be happy.”

In fact, on the second floor of the hotel, on the landing where opened the private rooms of the Ambassador, there was a Chinese sofa with a mattress, and hard pillows covered with red silk.

The servants brought the roll of blankets and the small trunk of Nelumbo. They unfolded a large, high screen, which shut up completely the end of the landing and formed a sort of small room.

The young girl sat on the edge of her new bed, surveying their exertions with the utmost evident



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lack of interest. When they had finished, she unrolled her blankets, and lay peacefully down.

"Are you comfortable?" asked Monique.  
"Do you wish anything?"

"Don't ask her," said Ming-ni. "She shall have what she is given, and must not be trained to ask for anything. She had had her dinner just before we arrived in the station. My servant will give her what she needs. Let's go and speak of ourselves."

And, in fact, the girl had had her food. She had nothing to do. She could not read, and she had a natural hatred of needlework or work of any sort. What could she do? She looked drowsily round, then closed her eyes and went to sleep.

Madame de Rosen went away at last, her curiosity struggling with her maternal feelings. The perfect simplicity of the proceedings had so astonished her that she could not find any relation between the facts and the innumerable stories of adultery she had heard of in her long life. Here there were no passionate outbursts, no pretences of an eternal and surprising love before which all duties, all promises, had to be left aside and forgotten.

On the contrary, the whole thing appeared to her as the most natural thing in the world. It had even some flavour of patriarchal dignity and grandeur which recalled dimly to the old lady passages of the Scriptures. And she was troubled. She knew that it was all against the rules of society, and in consequence very wrong.

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She felt, however, that there was a truth in it which could not be denied. Being unused to psychological analysis, she suffered from the contradiction without being able to understand. She had been trained to have on everything the opinion of the majority, and she found herself in presence of a situation on which she had never heard an opinion uttered. She was obliged for once to think by herself, and was incapable of such a manifestation of personality.

Monique had no time to think about the question at all. As soon as they were alone, Ming-ni knelt in front of her, and, in spite of her protests, insisted on saluting her as the Mistress of the Palace.

"You have done the right thing at the right moment," said he, "at whatever the cost to your own feelings. I promise you that you will never regret it. I have brought you the key of our family treasures, of which you are henceforward the guardian."

"But I prefer that you should keep it," answered she.

"It is your duty. You know that Chinese functionaries cannot be appointed to a responsible employment unless they are married, so that their wives should be entrusted with the public funds while the functionaries are out on duty. I have brought you also presents from my mother, my father, and every member of the family."

Out of the trunks in the room he drew then jewels and jewels, dresses and robes of every



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description, and every one of extreme beauty and great value.

For a long time, they spoke of the Palace of a Hundred Flowers, of the old Chen, of the gardens, and of the thousand interests and questions which Monique would have now to decide by herself.

On the morrow the secretaries, who had heard of her new dignity, greeted her with the designation of her rank, "Glorious and Brilliant Wife," and came to her for all the accounts of the Embassy.

Engrossed with her duties, she worked on, until she suddenly remembered Nelumbo. Reproaching herself for her forgetfulness, she went upstairs to the screen. She was about to knock, but refrained herself, remembering in time that the other was only a slave. She pulled a part of the screen aside and entered. The girl was there, reclining and eating dreamily some "li-tse-trang," which are sugared seeds of lotus. She stood up at once on seeing the First Wife and wanted to kneel, but Monique stopped her again, told her to lie down, and sat on the edge of the bed.

"Did you sleep well?" asked she.

"Very well, thanks to the First Wife," answered the other.

"Did you have your breakfast this morning?"

"Oh yes, the chrai-kwan has brought me a tray."

"You had enough? Everything was satisfactory?"

"Oh yes, thanks to the First Wife."

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"Because you must be very careful in your condition."

The conversation was a series of questions and answers. Monique found herself at a loss for a subject. After a few moments she went away.

Madame de Rosen came in the afternoon and asked to see the girl. Monique did not like the demand, but she had no reason to refuse, and took her mother to see her. Nelumbo was asleep.

"Anyhow," said the old lady, "she does not seem to be very intelligent. As to her face, though she looks healthy, I think she is very ugly."

"Not from a Chinese point of view," answered Monique. "And it appears that, though she seems to be slow, her parents were very clever. Perhaps it is laziness only."

On the following days, Monique tried again to speak to her, but did not succeed in obtaining any other replies than perpetual and respectful assents. Ming-ni saw her and said :

"She is only a slave. Do not speak to her. She is here to give us children, to obey your orders, and that is all."

In fact, Nelumbo seemed to be more surprised than happy at these attentions. She had a dim fear that the exertions of the First Wife to give her distractions should be intended in reality to make her work, and she thought to herself :

"I have been bought to give them a child. I do my duty. They have nothing to reproach me with. I cannot be expected to do anything else."

Indeed, she never did anything else. When-



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ever one opened the screen, there she was, always on the "krang," sometimes sleeping, sometimes sitting up with crossed legs and chewing slowly some seeds of sunflower, or "li-tse-trang." Monique gave her European sweets, which disappeared still more quickly.

Sometimes the noise of her snoring filled the stairs, to the intense delight of Madame de Rosen, when she happened to be there at such times.

The question of her toilet remained always an unsolved mystery. She was dressed day and night, as is the custom in China in winter ; and the climate of Paris seemed very cold to her. Monique suggested a bath, but Ming-ni said very wisely that as it would have been the first she had in her life, it was better to postpone the experience until after the birth of the child. Monique had to content herself with providing her every day with new underlinen, which, however, was not frequently changed. She saw also that a toilet table and accessories were placed behind the screen. Some sharp orders given through the "chrai-kwan" resulted in a visible improvement in the cleanliness of the face and hands of Nelumbo.

And thus the days went by, and Monique thought that she had grown accustomed to polygamy. She said even to her husband :

"If this one does not have a son, we will ask Orchid to buy us another, so that we shall have more chance to succeed. Two precautions are better than one."

## XXIV

AFTER a certain time, Monique was irritated by the complete and decided idleness of Nelumbo. There is nothing so exasperating to physically active people as the happiness felt by lazy persons who are doing nothing. To the absolute incomprehension of a feeling they have never experienced, is added the salt of the growing respect for physical work which prevails in our more and more barbarous civilization. The life of the spirit is of too high an order for the low politicians and unscrupulous business men who possess now all the riches and power of the Western world.

The life of the spirit was not exactly the strong point of Nelumbo. But the hazy dreams which passed through the mind of the girl were sufficient to give her a satisfaction that nothing else could afford her. She had a sort of notion that Monique would have liked her to sew a part of the future child's linen. But she knew also that nobody would touch her, protected as she was by the safeguard she had in herself. And she kept to the letter of her contract, and did nothing else than what she had been engaged to do.

It may be also that Monique's exasperations were due to her uneasiness. Her husband was certainly as tender, affectionate and dutiful as ever with her. But the thought of his relations



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with the girl came back sometimes to her mind, and always with a particular unpleasantness.

As to Ming-ni, he did not seem to perceive the thoughts of his wife. He never paid the least attention to the slave, and spoke only of the child.

Madame de Rosen, perhaps, was also a cause of the new current of thoughts of her daughter. She had not yet grasped the simplicity of the situation, and kept discussing it with her friends. She had even the lack of judgment to speak of it to Monique. Or if she did not mention directly the subject, she recounted stories of divorces.

"But I thought you were a Catholic," was the ironical answer of the young woman.

"You know very well that there are fourteen official cases of nullification of marriage recognized by the Court of Rome. One always finds oneself in one or the other of such cases. Look at Madame X . . . and Madame Z. . . ."

"They did not love their husbands. That is why they consented to divorce."

"Love ! love !" grumbled the old lady. "Love and marriage go very seldom together. A good match is one between two families of the same standing, same opinions, and same social prejudices. One does not marry a woman, but a family."

"That is true," answered Monique. "When the families do not agree completely, the newly married couple has to adopt one or the other, under penalty of the worst dissensions, I know that."

On other days, on the contrary, Madame de

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Rosen expatiated on the happy view of life held by the courtiers in the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI.

"Love in marriage is an ideal of the lower classes. They do not care about founding a family, and have as many children as the rabbits do. As they do not possess the means of procuring to themselves agreeable extra conjugal loves, they hope to combine two contradictory things, and make a muddle of the two. Ah ! they knew how to have a jolly life in the eighteenth century."

"But we are no more in the eighteenth century," answered Monique. "And there are other ways of combining love, children and family. Europe is not all the world, and our narrow Western views are not the only ones that humanity and civilization have invented."

"Of course . . . your polygamy."

"Why not? Polygamy exists in fact in Europe. Why not give it the recognisance of the law. Why not make it legal, since it is impossible to prevent it?"

But when her mother was gone, Monique was again absorbed in her reflections. She loved her husband, and was very angry with herself not to be pleased with his happiness. She despised herself for being like so many ordinary souls whose feelings are made only of the pleasure they receive and never on the joys they may give.

It was while she was silently struggling with herself that she had her first real shock. One night she woke up in the dark. Everything was



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silent in the room. She did not even hear the light breathing of her husband. Though still half asleep, she was astonished, and stretched her arm to touch him. The place of her husband at her side was empty, and nearly cold.

Thoroughly awake now, she listened intently, as one does in the night. And then she heard, out of her door, on the landing, the sound of voices and hushed laughter.

Suddenly she understood. There, behind the screen, was Nelumbo.

It was for her as if she had been stabbed in the heart. She realized at once and with an overwhelming bitterness the full signification of the consent she had given to her husband.

Here she was, deceived without being deceived ; abandoned without being abandoned ; loved, however, and respected by her husband, though in a situation that would have caused any Westerner to act violently.

There was a whirling of feelings in her heart. One second she sat up, ready to surprise them and throw the girl down the stairs, and another second she remembered her promise, and fell down again. She was already Oriental enough to know that in spite of the facts, her husband did not cease to love her. He did not lie to her, and was perfectly frank, affectionate and straightforward. Jealousy nevertheless tortured and upset her.

The tears at last ran down her cheeks. She buried her head in the pillows to stifle her sobs, and she waited.

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But her grief had been so biting that she lost consciousness. The deep sleep of strong emotions seized her at last.

Her husband woke her up on the morrow by a tender caress as usual. She smiled to him, when the memory of last night's events came back to her. She felt a wild impulse to threaten him, to insult him, or to supplicate him. But again she restrained herself. What could she say? What reproach was it possible to address to him? Was he not the most true and loyal husband? Was he not doing his duty towards her?

During the whole day she went mechanically about her occupations, benumbed as if she had been beaten. She tried to think, but she could only feel. Her soul was a battleground between jealousy and self-respect, between duty, love and selfishness.

She dared not speak to her husband, and did not know what to do. She could not say that she would not keep her promise. It was too late ; moreover, the mischief was done. But she promised herself that she would send away without any delay that stupid, lazy, and fat good-for-nothing girl. And she was certain that the child would also roll expressionless eyes in a moonlike face. He would be fat, silly and dirty. She hated him in advance.

On the following night, she did not go to sleep, but feigned to be very tired. Ming-ni, believing she did not know what he did, got softly out of bed and went to the landing.



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Monique, alone in the darkness, listened to the others, and again she sobbed silently in her sorrow.

Henceforward she passed her days in an agony of jealousy and despair. She had the strength to keep her grief to herself, and did not even let it be suspected by her mother. She knew too well that the old lady would worry her and lead her to extreme resolutions which were in keeping with Western life, but could not be accepted by her new feeling of duty.

She was always the same with her husband, though she had the greatest difficulty in submitting to his kisses.

She could not, however, restrain herself towards Nelumbo. The girl's laziness exasperated her more than ever, and she was obliged to exert all her own self-possession to hold back her hand ready to strike the unsuspecting object of her jealousy. She spoke to her in harsh tones, and tried to make her life as much of a misery as the stolid indifference of the girl allowed it. She curtailed her allowances of "li-tse-trang" and sunflower seeds, and she kept remonstrating very sharply on her constant idleness and general lack of tidiness.

Ming-ni noticed it, and was very sorry about it. But he knew human, and especially feminine nature well enough to rest assured that the less dangerous course was still silence. In two months the child would be born, and the mother might be removed to a safer and more distant place.

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His apparent unconcern did not appease his wife, nevertheless. Monique lost more and more her self-respect and the mastery of her impulses. She even acquired the habit, when her friends came to visit her, of taking them upstairs. Then, pushing aside the screen, she dragged the blanket which covered the poor girl in her sleep. Showing her still half awake, she said with a withering contempt :

“Have you ever seen such an object?”

And her friends, thus encouraged, laughed and made more or less witty remarks on Nelumbo, who hid her face in her arm in order to protect herself against possible ill-treatment.

She spoke now freely to anybody about the subject, with the apparent hope of getting useful counsel, but in reality in order to discharge her growing bitterness. Even the things she used to love caused her now weariness only. Always careful of her household duties, she grew more and more authoritative and exacting with the servants. She liked solitude, and was found sometimes in her boudoir, sitting idle, holding a book she could not read, or beginning to write letters she could not finish, and had to tear up into pieces.

One day, at last, after a more than usually severe fit of anger against Nelumbo, she felt a choking sensation in her throat and fainted. She was found half an hour later, still unconscious, and was put to bed. A raging fever declared itself. A doctor was called, and could not pronounce himself on the case.



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For several days she remained thus delirious. Madame de Rosen did not leave her bedroom, and kept changing constantly the ice on her head. Ming-ni went in and out every instant, and had to put his work completely aside.

On the first night, the old dame found herself with her son-in-law. In her most ironical tone she said :

“ Are you happy? You have killed her with your disgraceful misconduct ! She will die, and it is your fault ! Are you satisfied? ”

Ming-ni was so surprised by this unexpected attack that he could not find a word in answer.

“ Yes, you have killed her ! ” continued the other defiantly. “ But I will sue you for it. I will say to the tribunal that by your skilful little tricks you have obtained her consent, and I will produce your dirty little Nelumbo. We shall see what happens.”

“ Let us save her first,” replied Ming-ni sadly. “ If by the most dreadful misfortune she was to die, I would let you kill me if you choose. I would not defend myself. I love her more than I do love myself.”

“ And you had the courage to torture her as you did? ”

“ She tortured herself with your silly Western notions. You are all mad, you people of Europe.”

Madame de Rosen turned white and speechless with rage, and Ming-ni availed himself of the respite to open the door and go away.

## XXV

THE fever at last abated, and one morning Monique asked her mother in a feeble voice :

“ Why are you here, mama? Have I been ill? ”

Ming-ni, who was sitting in another armchair, came at once and knelt by her bed, kissing her hand and saying in a happy tone :

“ Saved at last, my love ! You are saved ! ”

She smiled gently and said :

“ Have I been so ill? ”

“ Be quiet,” answered her mother, arranging her pillows. “ You have not been very well. It is finished now. But you must have complete rest.”

Ming-ni stood up to go, but she held him back.

“ Don't go away,” said she. “ I would like you to stay by me while mother rests a little.”

In the afternoon she was decidedly better, and insisted on opening the letters which had come for her during her illness. Among those was a long message from Orchid.

To the Glorious and Brilliant Wife, Mistress of the Palace of a Hundred Flowers.

Dearest friend, you have written to me several times lately, but never on yourself. I conclude that you have some secret sorrow.



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Excuse me for writing so freely on such private matters. But I cannot prevent myself from thinking that I know the cause of your torment. The burning poison of jealousy runs in your blood, and you cannot bear to know that your husband should give a part of himself to another woman.

This feeling is, alas ! very common. There are even wives who cannot bear to see their husbands working or reading, or being interested in anything else than their little feminine occupations or pleasures, their gowns or hats, or their petty caprices. It is evident that for a man it would be far better to be hated than to be loved in such a manner.

We must content ourselves, we women, not to be everything in the life of a man. If he gives us his entire and unreserved love, if he is true and open with us, we must be happy. In truth, we understand that so well that we despise and do not love any more a man weak enough to let himself be ruled entirely by his wife. A drink in which there is too much sugar seems very good at first, but soon we find it too sweet and we cannot touch it any more.

The passionate and exacting mastery of love may be desired in those rapid and passing unions which are allowed to concubines, and to those men and women who walk incessantly under the flowers of pleasure and the willows of misconduct.

But for us, First Wives, the aim is different. We are the associate, the sure and loving friend, the constant help. We have not married a man for our own egotistical, animal and useless pleasures, but to partake of his success or failure. And thus our first duty, for him, for our children and for ourselves, is to sustain and increase his strength for the everyday struggle ; to prevent him from forgetting the presence of the enemy when he is intoxicated by his victory ; to soften his wounds and to encourage him to fight again when he comes back vanquished from an encounter.

Our disinterested love for our children gives us an instinctive vision of the Truth, Right and Justice. We must influence and guide our husband among the dangers that



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he does not see. We must protect him against ourselves and against himself, so that all his strength should be employed for us and for our children.

And then, even if Fate has decreed that our efforts should be in vain, we feel a durable and deep happiness, without bitter remorse. Because those even who respect only the riches and the vilest satisfactions are obliged to bend their heads before Righteousness. Fortunate or unfortunate, Righteousness has a mysterious and invincible force before which no other force is victorious, and the best proof is that, in order to succeed, Evil has to hide its ugly ways under the appearance of Virtue and Truth.

Monique put down the letter and pondered. She remembered the time when such a letter would have provoked in her a sceptical smile. It was in the days when she considered as great men the false prophets who fill modern cities with their insolent and gross publicity.

In her soul, washed by the recent approach of death, the dawn of a new light illuminated her present and past. Her jealousy appeared to her as a passing madness. She looked at her husband, in whose face shone an unalterable and entire love, and it seemed to her that she suddenly ceased plodding in the mud of the Road of Life, and that she was now soaring peacefully in the pure atmosphere of a clear summer sky.

She said softly to her husband, who was beside her bed :

“ Will you call in the mother of our child? ”

He looked at her. Reading in her eyes, he knew that Good had conquered in her soul, and said simply :



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"I thank the mother of our sons and grandsons."

He went out of the room, and an instant after Nelumbo came in with him. She stopped hesitatingly, saying in her musical voice :

"Is the First Wife any better?"

"Yes," answered Monique. "I am much better. And you? Did you have everything that you desired?"

And as the young girl came nearer, Monique gently caressed her cheeks.

"You look a little pale."

Then speaking to Ming-ni :

"The mother of our first child cannot stay on that landing. It is neither healthy nor proper. Will you tell the servants to move all the furniture out of my boudoir? We will put a good bed there, and she will be in more comfortable conditions for her confinement. And she must also go out in the motor-car and walk in the Bois-de-Boulogne. It will give her strength."

"I thank you again," said Ming-ni.

On the same night, Nelumbo was installed in the room. She accepted it as she had submitted to the rest, without giving great importance to the fact, and without trying to understand its cause. It was thus, and that was all. The drives in the motor-car left her equally indifferent. There, or elsewhere, as long as she was not beaten, was not obliged to work, and had enough to eat, she was happy. Her simple soul

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was asleep, and was not very different from that of the cats, who purr happily by the fireside.

Time, however, passed as swiftly as an arrow. Monique now was much better, and could walk about in the house. It seemed to her that she came back from a long absence. Everything was changed for her. The smallest object awoke a different sensation in her mind.

In place of the gushing torrent of passion rolling in her soul, it seemed to her that a calm river of crystal waters passed gently in the sunshine of an autumn day. She was not filled any more with wild and selfish desires, with uncontrollable feelings which sped her onward in spite of herself, as the spurs of the horsemen do to a generous horse. She was carried on softly as in a sailing boat with a gentle breeze. A new sense of harmony, order, and beauty had been born in her.

Her mother did not recognize her, and did not venture to relate any more to her scandalous Parisian stories. The old lady was not herself either. Her anxiousness for Monique's happiness at first, and her life afterwards, had renewed her religious feelings. She went now every day to church, and often twice a day.

She declared at last to her daughter that it was time for her to think of her eternal salvation, and that she had decided to retire completely in the convent for old ladies of the Avenue Malakoff. There she would be in constant communication with the priests, and she would be in the best possible condition for the end.



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Monique tried to dissuade her, but in vain.

“You are now,” said Madame de Rosen, “in a stage of your life when I cannot be of any more use to you. It is even the contrary. I do not understand you very well, and my help is no help to you. We can see each other as often as we want to, and you may be quite at rest about me, since I shall never be alone, and I shall have every spiritual and material comfort.”

Her decision being irrevocable, Madame de Rosen had all her family furniture removed and carried to the Embassy, and she settled in the convent.

It must be said that she found there a happiness on which she did not reckon; the visitors who came every day to see the other ladies were soon introduced to her. In addition to the respectable number of persons who lived in the convent, she had thus a varied circle of acquaintances, who gave her the sole distraction which seems to appeal to aged ladies—conversation and social intercourse without the difficulty of going out and paying visits.

At the Embassy, the moment approached when one had to prepare everything and be ready. A nurse stayed and obliged Nelumbo to walk and take the precautions habitual in such cases.

One morning, before one had time to call the doctor, the child was born. It was a girl.

There is nothing which is as nice and funny as a Chinese baby. They have such serious black eyes and such red little lips in such round

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little faces without any nose ; they have such comical expressions when they smile or cry, that it is difficult not to be attracted by them.

When Monique entered the room, Nelumbo took the baby, who reclined beside her, and presented her to the young woman, saying :

“ Here is your child, O First Wife. Have I fulfilled my duty? ”

Monique had always thought that she would feel the greatest antipathy for the child of her husband by a stranger. But when she saw the little object holding out its arms to her, she thought of her husband only, and took the baby in her arms, as she would have done for the daughter of a beloved brother.

“ She belongs to both of us,” answered she. “ You shall nourish her, and you shall stay with us.”

The usually expressionless face of Nelumbo was lighted by a smile of gratefulness and pleasure. She seized the hand of Monique and kissed it.

A new peace and happiness reigned in the house. Monique grew to love the little girl, who was constantly laughing and playing. Nelumbo would not let anybody else help her, and was now as active as she had been lazy before.

As to Ming-ni, he had been deeply disappointed not to have had a son. He thought even of buying another girl, but restrained himself in time, in the hope of a better success in the near future.



## XXVI

THE happiness of the household was soon troubled by sad news : a telegram informed Ming-ni of the death of his father. The old Chen had not been able to enjoy for very long the freedom obtained at the death of his First Wife. A congestion had taken him away in a few minutes after a little feast given to chosen friends.

Ming-ni could not think of remaining out of his country. The necessities of managing his fortune, and also his new duties of chief of the family, obliged him to start without any delay and to remain in the Palace of a Hundred Flowers. He telegraphed to Peking the news of his mourning, and received the authorization of resigning at once his functions.

Monique had a great sorrow at leaving her mother. It was again one of the most painful periods of her married life. She proposed to the old lady to take her away with them, but the other refused most energetically.

"No, no, my dearest, I cannot go over there with you. It is too far, and I am too old. My health is not of the best, and I would be a great source of embarrassment for you if I was ill on the way. Besides, what could I do in China? I should be lost. No, no, I will stay

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and be buried here beside your father. I am thankful to have kept you so long with me when I might have been separated from you long ago."

"But the journey is nothing, mother ; many aged ladies have done it easily."

"If you lived amongst Europeans, I would try, perhaps. But, so far in the interior of China, even with you, I should feel lost. Maybe you will be able to come back next year on a visit. You say there is a railway now not far from your city."

In spite of their mutual promises of a speedy reunion, they had a presentiment that they parted for the last time. But Monique could not stay and let her husband go alone. He would not have accepted it, though he proposed it most dutifully to his mother-in-law.

"No, no, my dear son-in-law. Your life must not be stopped by me. You have your duties, which are also Monique's duties. It is unhappily impossible to arrange our lives as we would like to do. And maybe, if it was possible, we should too often make a terrible muddle of it, and render ourselves still more miserable than we all are in the present conditions."

When they returned to the Embassy Monique was in tears. Her husband tried to console her, but she said :

"You do not know what it is to have a friend and a mother in the same person. I have never had any thought hidden from her, and she has never had any that she did not tell me. She is



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not well at all, and I am sure that I shall not see her again."

"Then, my dear, if such are your feelings, I will delay our departure."

And, without listening to her entreaties, he called his servant and told him that their journey was postponed for a week or two.

He had hardly finished, and Monique had already gone to see her mother, when he was called to the telephone. The Superior of the Convent, who spoke to him, asked him to inform his wife that Madame de Rosen had fainted after her departure.

He started at once, but could not immediately find a cab. He arrived at the Convent a quarter of an hour after his wife. Madame de Rosen had recovered sufficiently to recognize her daughter and kiss her a last time. Then she had swooned again. When the doctor came, he could only say that all was over.

Monique was nearly mad with the thought that she had caused the death of her mother. It needed all the power of persuasion of the Lady Superior of the Convent and of the doctor to make her admit that Madame de Rosen had had already several accidents of the same kind, and that it was only a coincidence.

The painful details of the funeral tired Monique so much physically that she had no more strength for her grief. She went through all the ceremonies in a dazed, even in a stunned, fashion which moved her husband deeply.

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Ming-ni was even so anxious about her that he hastened their departure, in order to carry her away from the scene of her sorrow.

They started, in consequence, a few days after. The last visit to the cemetery filled Monique with such a sadness that she hardly perceived the little incidents of the route : the last farewell of her friends and of the staff of the Embassy, the train, Marseilles.

It was only when the ship left her mooring, and when the coast disappeared slowly under the blue horizon of the sea, that she realized, all at once, that the last link which bound her to the country of her childhood and youth was definitively broken. She left nothing and nobody behind. Her husband henceforward was all in all for her.

She turned to him, and, leaning trustfully her head on his shoulder, she sobbed. But now the bitterness was gone from her tears. And while the regular beating of the screw carried them farther and farther from Europe, she thought of the Palace of a Hundred Flowers ; she remembered her dream, and she said to her husband in a whisper :

“ I shall have a son. I know it.”

“ How do you know, O Dearest? ” asked he, astonished.

And she told him her vision.

“ My mother sent it to you,” said he simply.

“ What you have dreamt will come true. I know it, O my First Wife, the mother of my sons and grandsons.”



## XXVII

A NEW peace and understanding had sprung up between the two. Maybe the atmosphere of the East brought them already that abandon, that indifference in one's own destiny, that conviction that life is but a lottery on which we have no action, which the feverish Europeans have termed fatalism, while they proudly ascribe all their own successes to their virtues, and their failures to bad luck.

Each of the ports recalled to Monique her past feelings and enthusiasm ; her hopes, most of which had proved deceitful ; her judgments, now incomprehensible to her new being.

She felt certain that she left Europe for ever, and with Europe, a great part of herself, and she turned back mentally, passing in review the already abundant cortège of her souvenirs.

She was also at an age when hope has ceased to make us strain our eyes towards the future ; when we begin to reap the harvest of our first efforts ; when we do not expect any more grand things and exceptional successes. The blind confidence of youth is no more in us. We have more or less known failure, or gone very near to it, and we perceive that everything depends on luck.

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Happy those who have been sufficiently gifted from birth to meet all the requirements of their lives, and who, moreover, have always been served by circumstances.

But a thousand times happier those who, looking back in their past life, survey the long line of their past actions, and never detect among the white and fresh robes of the good deeds the dark and soiled dress of an evil action done resolutely in view of material advantage.

In the chorus of our past a false note jars as harshly as in an orchestra, and it has the additional bitterness that we cannot ignore it or forget it.

Monique, stretched on the deck chair, under the shady awning covering the deck from the fierce rays of the sun, followed vaguely the antics of the flying-fishes. Her body, resting at ease, did not make its presence felt, and liberated her spirit and soul. In the great peace of the limitless blue sea, to the regular throbbing of the engines, she reviewed her life, and was thankful that, in spite of her education and origin, she had never made anything that was not in keeping with her new self. She could look at all her past wishes and acts with the indulgent smile of a mother at the frolics of a favourite child.

Ming-ni was now in perfect communion with her. He was certain of the coming of a son, and was happy in the feeling that the Unknowable favoured his wishes and protected his



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family. He ascribed it to the powerful influence of his ancestors, giving to these words the meaning which every educated person gives to them ; that is to say, that the hidden and uncontrollable impulses which prompted his views on all things were inherited from the long line of his ancestors. The dead dictated his conduct in spite of himself, and drove him amidst the unfathomable dangers of the present on to the unguessable possibilities of the future.

When they passed Ceylon, Monique remembered, with emotion, her precedent enthusiasm at this Gate of Paradise. She saw vividly the contrast between her former feelings, based entirely on the personal satisfaction of a whim, and her present sentiments, prompted only by her duties towards the family she had chosen, the father of her child, and her child himself. Again, she was thankful that her past motives, so changeable and superficial, should not have led her astray, and should not have ruined her life and her future chances of happiness.

Desire, which Buddha taught to be the cause of all our torments, had ceased to ride her soul and to spur her onwards. The peace of contentment, attained by satisfaction or by renunciation, had settled upon her.

After the rushing and roaring torrents of her early youth, the river of her interior life flowed calmly in the plains of her maturity.

The Palace of a Hundred Flowers seemed to

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her more beautiful than ever. Autumn had already begun, and the gorgeous colours of the season covered trees and bushes with a splendid coat of purple and gold. September is a second spring for the flowers in China, while the undescribable clearness of the atmosphere and purity of the light, mixed with the bracing coolness of mornings and nights, give a new beauty to the earth and sky, and make of the sheer act of living and breathing an intense delight and an unceasing source of new pleasures.

She was now installed in the apartments of the First Wife. Her bedroom was large and clean. The whole wall on the garden was made with panels of trellised wood, on which a translucent paper was spread and stuck. When the panels were shut, a diffused and soft light filled the room. No view being obtainable of and from the exterior, a feeling of absolute privacy and undisturbable peace reigned, and was singularly calming. When the panels were opened, one was as in an open verandah on the garden, the light being, however, still softened by the shade of the projecting roof, supported by thick lacquered columns.

The walls were painted a pale green, with gold flowers, and a thick golden carpet with pale green designs made a delightful mixture of colours in the room. Some massive low sculptured chest of drawers and chairs were covered with a green lacquer, the high sculptures having some touches of gold and vermillion.



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The bed was of the same material, big, square and low. Monique had to change for a wire mattress the boards on which her mother-in-law had slept. She had not been trained from youth to the hard Chinese beds.

The days passed by, happy and simple. She awoke in the morning and had all the panels lifted in order to enjoy the fine brilliant haze of the morning light and the perfumed and cool air. She gave her orders for the day. This first duty being finished and her toilet ended, she had generally the visit of Orchid, whom she had seen again with a pleasure even greater than she had expected. They discussed together the unending questions of the household and gardens, the education of the children ; and then the evening meal came with the night.

All the members of the family were present to the meal—sisters, sisters-in-law, and even the second wives of the old Chen. But in place of the restraint of former years, there reigned a confidence and a simple happiness which made of the reunion the most pleasant moment of the day. To be invited was indeed a prized honour. Monique was now cited as a model for the women of the city, as she had been cited before in a different way. Her example and her indirect influence on the general happiness of the city was so patent that the Governor of the city sent a report on the subject to his superiors, as a base for the proposed construction of a school for girls in the city.

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This was a great innovation, but the spirit of the century had at last penetrated in this far-off region. The railway was now completed, and brought with it a well-being and a variety of work which had never been known before. The muleteers and cart-men had turned into railway workers, and found the job easier and better paid. As it was new, they had not had time to be wearied by its monotony, and they had not yet perceived that, from their former state of free and intelligent workers, they had become simple machines in the hands of an unknown, irresponsible, and, in consequence, very dangerous group of rulers.

Mackensie was now a very important person in the province. All the intended railways and roads were in his control, and his decision was final. He was entitled to the green sedan-chair of the high functionaries. His rank, coupled with his personal justice and integrity, had won for him the love and respect of the whole population.

Old Wang had now retired from his active function, and contented himself with supervising the new manager of the gardens. He had also undertaken to teach poetry to his grandchildren. It was a touching and delightful sight to behold such lessons. The little dark-headed boys and girls (there were two of each) surrounding the old man, all sitting cross-legged on the ground in some shady part of the garden, and repeating, with the proper intonation, the poems which their



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grandfather recited. Their fresh and clear voices rose and fell harmoniously in a chorus which delighted the old poet's heart. Among them, were the children of Red Peony and Little Badger, both having married shortly after their master.

And thus the days passed, happy, uneventful, until one beautiful afternoon of early November, while the clear sun shone peacefully on the golden trees, and the light evening breeze balanced gently the rustling leaves, Monique's baby was born. Ming-ni, Orchid, and an aged and experienced matron were in the room, while outside stood the gathering crowd of sisters-in-law and other ladies of the household.

At last the matron stood up, with a broad smile on her wrinkled yellow face, and presented the child to Ming-ni :

“ Here is your son, O Happy Father ! Don't forget the herald of good news,” said she.

“ It is a son ! Our ancestors be thanked ! ” repeated the ladies outside.

“ I knew it,” said Ming-ni simply.

“ I knew it,” repeated the happy mother, holding out her hand to her husband kneeling beside her bed. “ My dream will come true.”

